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THE CASTLE OF CONTENTMENT

Nisler, Gunnar

THE CASTLE OF CONTENTMENT

Letters from a Jutland Farm

by JÆGERMESTER PLOV, pseud.

Translated from
the Danish by
Astrid Rosing Sawyer
and Llewellyn Jones

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Dedicated to

Ruth Bryan Owen

(Kammerjunkerinde Rohde)

in appreciation of her constant interest
in the furtherance of friendship
between Denmark
and America

H. W. 9/27/38

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FOREWORD

If you look at the map of Europe you will hardly notice the little spot called Denmark. And yet it is not only the country where Hans Christian Andersen wrote his fairy tales, but perhaps the only civilized nation in the world that has been independent and self-supporting and unconquered by any other nation for more than a thousand years. And that in spite of the fact that its history is one long series of wars with more powerful neighbors.

We who were born in this land and are proud of its history may now in our time often ask ourselves whence our forefathers got this strength, this martial spirit to which the country owes its thousand years of existence. For nothing in the aspect of the country suggests wild warriors and mighty blows. Only one feature of the Danish landscape recalls

the period when the Danish Viking ships ravaged and plundered all European coasts and appropriated England and a large part of France: the Viking graves which, like hills, lie spread over the land, in some places so close together that, standing in one spot, one can see ten of them in the neighborhood.

Beside the heroes who lie buried in these hills their swords were laid, that their bearers might be ready for the long journey to Valhalla. Now we bury our dead with flowers, and as the transition from the sharp sword to the mild flower, so also is that through which our mind has passed. Those of us who still have the most Viking blood in our veins criticize the others for their weak spirit. Even my son, who in the forty-third generation descends from that Viking king who, nearly two hundred years before Leif the Lucky discovered America, moved on England and conquered most of it and killed King Ella by cutting an eagle in his back — even that boy reproaches his father for turning away and finding comfort in peace instead of consecrating his life to war.

But in an arched cellar under the old Kronborg castle at Elsinore, where Hamlet met his father's spirit, there sits the emblem of the old Danish heroic strength, Holger the Dane, and sleeps while his beard grows fast to the stone-topped table. He will awaken some day, they say, when Denmark is in

need. But still he sleeps on, and meanwhile generation after generation is born and buried, and, out in the world, history's checkered panorama rolls by; and every farm in the land is its own little world where life is lived as circumstances permit and as the spirit dictates.

Politics, war and revolution, to be sure, are talked about, but life goes on day by day almost untouched by their discussion. Not that we who sit around on Denmark's farms are not materially affected by world events — yes, there is no farm so small nor so distant that the economic upset of the times does not reach it. But life as we see it is the result of many much more intimate circumstances — our own disposition, the nature about us, the animals, the people, and the thousand and one little things that give a farm its atmosphere.

These are discordant times for Danish agriculture. After twenty-five years' sway it has lost its political power in the country and at the same time its leading position in its old markets and the confidence of capital, and with these, half its hopes and dreams. Only the man with ability to view his own life and his own time as an insignificant link in eternity, and who seeks his life's honey not in material expectations but in the cultivation of little things — all the little things that together form the mosaic called life — only he can smile at whatever comes

and dispassionately give ear to the tempest outside.

This book deals with a year's events in the life of such a farmer. It has grown from a series of weekly " letters " to readers of the oldest and largest paper in Denmark, *Berlingske Tidende*, and he who has written them considers himself only a servant who has held the pen. The thoughts are those of the times as they are lived among Denmark's beautiful beech trees while the flame of hatred among nations smolders the world over.

GUNNAR NISLEV
(Jaegermester Plov)

THE CASTLE OF CONTENTMENT

THE DRAWBRIDGE IS DOWN

The guests have gone to bed after their first day of delighted strolling all over the garden, the stables, and out on the fields. That's the way it always goes. Just as if they were afraid of missing a single corner of the whole place. So that is why they were thoroughly tired when they went to bed and why they will certainly sleep late in the morning.

It is fine to have guests — when they sleep late in the morning. I don't like it so well when they go poking around on the place before I am up. For the first two morning hours I much prefer to have peace to clean up my little tasks, look over the fields, and get the staff to work. And there are always letters to answer and the accounts that have to be kept by the day.

So when, some time in the morning, I hear the stairs creak — and under some of my guests they creak a good deal — I lay my work to one side, rub the lines of care from my forehead, if that be possible, and go out to greet them and discuss the weather. In the garden room the breakfast table is laid, and the ladies and the coffee urn provide entertainment. At nine thirty we get our mail, and I willingly accept the martyrdom of handing over to some guest the evening paper from the city. While he reads it I try to assuage my pain with the local paper, but I insist that of all the things I do to please a guest, nothing compares with the beneficence of letting him have the paper first while I sit quietly and pray that at any rate he refrain from spoiling it for me by retailing its contents, a crumb at a time. Surely a man who has reached forty may be allowed his eccentricities? To yearn for a peaceful reading of the paper, and before anyone else, is one eccentricity which is not half so easy for a country man to indulge as the city dweller may perhaps believe.

In the old days the bigger estates had drawbridges which could be lowered for guests whose shields indicated that they harbored no hostile intents. But now our farms lie open, and we are unprotected game for agents of all sorts and for absolute strangers who just want to see our conglomeration of

furniture and what sort of daubs we have on our walls.

While it is a fact that city dwellers very often don't answer when we climb up to their fourth floor flats and ring, still it is very seldom that city dwellers come in vain to visit us. By "in vain" I do not mean that we immediately pour the coffee into the urn, only to find that we do not have gas to bring the water to a boil, because, if coffee is good, so by the same token an invitation to come and see the outside of the Thorvaldsen Museum, even when it is extended to someone who has known it from infancy, is not something to be despised. We must never make invidious distinctions between material and spiritual gifts. No, what I mean to say is that a farmer, even if he doesn't sit in an office, can, as a rule, be found on the nearest field, while it is perfectly hopeless to go around in the city in search of a Copenhagener.

And it is still a sort of custom with us farmers not to hold the door closed against any even slightly distinguished guest who does not look as if he meant to stick his foot between door and threshold, and that means, of course, that the drawbridge is always down — and for everybody. I cannot let my maid say to a man, even if he has driven only a short distance, that I am busy for the moment but will be able to see him between two and three. And even

if I have peered from behind the curtains and made some such unfavorable diagnosis as oil salesman, storm insurance agent, or merely someone driven by curiosity, it doesn't help, for the maid's rural piety prevents her mastering the art of dissimulation. To say nothing of the fact that as often as not the visitor has heard through the open door our discussion of him. The drawbridge is down.

In fact, it is more or less down when we eat in the garden under the linden trees and an automobile rolls up and stops within three yards of us. And several fine, friendly chaps swarm out and tell us that their niece is so-and-so, and that she has talked so much about us, and so on, and so on. As often as not, in such an event, there is enough good humor as well as radishes and potato salad for the occasion. And then there is great and mutual gladness over the lowered drawbridge.

But suppose we drew it up! Suppose we let the maid go out to the automobile and announce that we were occupied at the moment, but that if there were any message she would be glad to take it — then what in the world would these people think of us? No, the bridge has got to be down. The same people who would find it incomparably impudent if anyone entered their villa garden on Planetree road, would with a perfectly good conscience park their car outside the garden gate of a farm in Jutland

and go in to watch the swans or enjoy the view of the lake. In North Seeland, or perhaps only in the neighborhood of Copenhagen, they would immediately find out that their action was not taken for granted; but in Jutland. . . .

The followers of Henry George have a phrase, "land monopoly," which means that I may have a perfect right to spread myself over a hundred acres while others cannot acquire any more earth than what is in their flowerpots. I am fully persuaded that we who have such a monopoly have also a duty — to give the public a broad margin when it concerns all such rights as we cannot or do not use professionally, by which I mean the beauties of the place, the views, bathing beaches and the like. Indeed, if we look at it from a legal point of view, an engraved deed, right now, means only one thing: that the duty of paying the owner's taxes cannot be shunted on to anyone else; for the rest, rights of ownership are problematical.

A city dweller's right to pitch a stranger out of his rented allotment garden no one will dispute, but if the allotment lies in Jutland, on a hundred acre estate, costs a fortune for upkeep and is taxed a thousand dollars a year, then he cannot, without a bad conscience, run like a watchdog at the uninvited guest. The drawbridge must be down.

I am not saying this in bitterness, and we open

gladly both the door of our house and the garden gate. But you won't find a museum with treasures on the walls. You will not find gardeners working with clippers on the lawn or tying up the tall stems of rare roses. You will find only a home where happy people live with their joys and sorrows. And if you limit yourself to a turn through the garden or a peep through the lilac hedge and then feel yourself disappointed at heart, it may perhaps console you to apply the words of Nicander: " The best is not visible to the world."

But all that I can show you, I will — the drawbridge is down.

AN INHERITANCE

The leaf buds on the beech are not yet visible, but in a sheltered hollow of my wood I saw thick buds today, so swollen indeed that if you cut off the branches and put them in water in a warm room they would certainly come into leaf. And this is only the beginning of January!

The honeysuckle has been sending out new shoots all through the winter, and now among the thickets its small green clusters are everywhere visible. They look like little bows on a gray tulle veil. One strand of honeysuckle has wound itself round a young pine tree — something it ought not to have done, for the tree was not tall, and if the honeysuckle were to reach the top it could go no further and yet would not have reached the open air. The tree was thin and had weak branches, and it was

evidently embarrassed by this close embrace. So I unwound the honeysuckle and brought it over to a spot from which it could wind itself around a dead tree.

You always find something to think about when you go through a wood. As often as not I carry a pair of small pruning shears with me to cut paths through the thickets. But the paths close in quickly in the summer; and if I come the same way a fortnight later I can hardly find them, and I must lift a branch or a bramble aside every moment or else the guest by my side would get scratched.

So it is really a less thankless job to make my paths in the woods. There the branches don't grow together again so quickly. But apart from that I must say that I prefer the wild woods, even if, like my own, they yield nothing for the account book, but must just be prodigal with manna for the soul. However, any sort of forestry work is a work with the future, and sometimes the far future, in view.

Once as a little boy I stood holding my brother's hand in a windswept churchyard. We were surrounded by a crowd of people in mourning who were following an old country squire to the grave. I remember how they crowded over the graves and trampled on hedges and borders. It was a whole neighborhood that said farewell to a man it had held

in esteem. He had been one of those lovable men who live according to the Sermon on the Mount, who are gentle and forbearing in everything they do, and he exhibited in all the relationships of his life that good will which does not bring a man riches — at least not of this world — but which does make his life rich and gives his eyes their clear and open light.

Now he was dead and a whole countryside was following his coffin. Everyone knew what manner of man it was who had left them, and of his life and his deeds there was only one opinion. It is an extraordinary thing that a hundred people can easily become one in their condemnation or exaltation of a man for what he has been or what he has done. But if the question is of his faith or his opinions, then the hundred will give you as many differing judgments. What, then, do you suppose is of most value: the belief or the deed?

In the thoughts of all these people who stood by the grave there was a single judgment of this man's life, and then a well intentioned clergyman endeavored to give the equivalent judgment of his beliefs. You could see how he was trying to infer the man's beliefs from his life and deeds, and that was all right as far as it went, because in the last resort those are the only evidence from which anyone can read a person's beliefs. For, as the Arabian

prayer has it, " Only God and myself know what abides in my heart."

The minister told of this man's life, of the prosperous circumstances in which he was born, of the disappointments he had suffered when he trusted his fellow men, and of how he had borne these disappointments as one to whom the whole of human life was as but a second in eternity. I remember only bits of the sermon, for I was such a little boy and I had on a new coat; but there was one phrase which I marked, though without understanding. In speaking of the old man's fortune, the minister used the phrase, " It was sufficient for his time."

The man was my grandfather, and now that I can understand what the minister meant to convey, I must smile at the consolation meant for us survivors in whose time probably it would not be sufficient. What his material circumstances may have been, is an arguable question, but I know a few things which were to his permanent credit.

One thing is what he left as a result of his work, and I thought of that when, during the war, I saw a whole neighborhood fetch firewood and timber from a wood which he had planted. If he had sunk a fortune in that wood, it had at least survived him and was there for his descendants after his death. And the men who were young and erect that day

in the churchyard have, as elderly men, driven heavy loads out of the wood which he created on the naked heath. And their sons likewise; and their sons too will come to fetch beams and rafters for their houses and barns. — Yes, there was sufficient for more than his time.

And there is another thing which will also remain — but this is perhaps only my own belief — : In the old days there were farms here and there which were significant only because they were the largest in their respective neighborhoods. And the same farm did not always hold that distinction a century through. It rose and fell with its occupant. A farm would become the center of the agriculture of a neighborhood, a pattern for its neighbors; then came a new owner and new times. From another farm there would radiate an influence of another kind which would stamp the neighborhood; and the greater the farm and the owner's social standing, the deeper the impression that was made.

I do not know what role my grandfather's farm played in the six hundred years of its existence, but I do know that it is not possible that a *good* man could live on it for a generation without making an impression on the life of the neighborhood. The integrity, helpfulness and kindliness which stamped him have not been allowed to vanish without leav-

ing their traces on the community; and, right or wrong, I shall always believe when I meet the public-spirited people of the neighborhood that in them I see the fruit of the seed sown by that man of whom it was said by his grave, " It was sufficient for his time " — only his time.

FALSE SPRING

The snow has melted and the ditches are filled with water. The west wind blows over the fields and howls in every cranny and keyhole. The ice on the lake is already breaking, showing many open pools with tiny crested waves where ducks lie rocking — as if they welcomed spring — at the edge of the ice. The ice always begins to thaw where the brook that runs through the garden empties into the lake, and from there the open water widens rapidly as it passes the garden and the meadows.

This morning, seeing all this, I had my first attack of spring fever. I don't know whether other farmers feel this way, but for me the first real sign of spring evokes an unrest, grounded doubtless in a feeling of being behindhand with the spring work. Even in the beginning of February my brain is

busied with harrow and roller and seeder, and all the work I thought we had plenty of time to do during winter suddenly seems to remain undone. And my uneasiness increases.

Many times a day I must pick up my stick and make for the fields or woods, and I fear that as I walk along I talk aloud to myself. As a boy I used to sing when I was sure no one was within earshot — you see, I knew I was no singer. Nor am I to this day; but now I can refrain from singing, something I couldn't do then. But that desire of an old man to talk to himself I make no effort to control. There are times when you need to confide in somebody, somebody who understands you and to whom you need not pretend; somebody who will not betray your secrets.

Old Niels and I probably are the only ones on the farm who talk to ourselves, but not satisfied with talking aloud, he gesticulates, so that from afar you can see what he is talking about. I have often from my window watched him at work in the garden. Now and then he rests his spade a moment, talks to himself, throws out his arm, inviting an invisible listener to strike him dead if he ever accedes to so unreasonable a demand. Then he shakes his head as though ready to give up, but suddenly makes a quick decision, puts his head to one side, narrows his eyes, stretches out his hand with the

final proposition. Evidently it is rejected, for he throws back his head and laughs so heartily that the blackbird up in the plum tree can look clear down his throat.

Chuckling, he goes on with his work.

I am not quite that talkative when I walk alone in the fields, but it might be fairly entertaining to walk alongside me unseen. I could wish, however, you had been with me this morning — visible or invisible, as you please. Then we would have walked from the yard along the brook where the wild roses grow; and I should probably have had to help you when we crossed the narrow plank to poke into the inlet to the fishponds. And over at the bridge you would have been surprised at my skill in fishing up duckweed with the curved end of my cane; together we would have enjoyed the sight of the brook's chuckling gladness when its flow was relieved of the obstacle.

In the meadows we followed the ditch to see if the drains were stopped, but they were all running. Only the last one was completely hidden in the bottom of the ditch, but you could easily see where it ended, for there the water rushed up through the sand as though it was boiling; and if you stooped down it resembled a crater under the water where the sand incessantly shot up, flowed down along the sides, disappeared and came up again.

Was it you or I who suddenly got the bright idea of sticking my cane down the crater? I believe it was I, but in the name of all frogs I am sorry that I did so, for in the next moment, out of the seething sand the hind leg of a frog protruded. Then one more leg. The owner of them apparently tried to crawl back into the slush, but the current was too strong, and up came Mr. Frog. It is not pleasant for a frog that has been sleeping comfortably in a drain pipe some two months to be awakened in the beginning of February with a poke from a walking stick. This one swam hurriedly over to a tree root where it bored itself in to resume its sleep.

Before it was well out of the way, another pair of legs stuck out, and a small light green frog emerged. Its sanguine attempt to breast the current was also in vain. With my cane I directed it toward the tree roots where it crept under a withered leaf. Then a somewhat larger dark green frog came headlong up from the crater — and next a couple of small ones. Now it seemed as though the water stopped momentarily before a sudden spurt; and slowly a very large frogleg pushed its long, bristly toes up and sought a foothold. It obviously belonged to a huge, dark green frog, who at any cost wished to remain down in the slush. I atoned somewhat for my misdemeanor by giving him my cane for a foothold, and away he went.

We stood a long while and watched the crater from which water and sand poured, first restlessly and unevenly; but gradually, as the frog crawled farther down the pipe, the stream became smoother, and finally nothing more unusual was visible. The chap had evidently found his old sleeping quarters. And there he'll stay until spring.

Did we give each other a warm look and say: " It must be a cold job to be a frog "?

IN SUN AND SNOW

I wonder whether in other places in the country there exists an institution known as "snow vacation." The children came storming home from school yesterday in the middle of the forenoon. The headmaster had declared a holiday because there was snow on the ground. — "And now, when we have eaten, we will do our lessons before we go out."

It sounded almost too good to be true. I felt a tickling in the corners of my eyes, and I am not sure there was not something that resembled a tiny tear. That is the usual thing with me; when I hear of something beautiful and noble, I immediately start weeping. But how could these adorable, well behaved children, of poor but struggling parents, repay in a more beautiful way the teacher's under-

standing of the child's longing for sled and ski than by refusing to enjoy them before they had worked out their sums and learned their French verbs, so that the next day, with clear childish eyes and good conscience and clean forehead, they could meet their mild and understanding teacher at the blackboard?

I believe, really, that I rubbed my eyes. Perhaps it was to whisk away the tear, and perhaps to assure myself that this was not just a wonderful dream. The first half of the dream was real enough, but it seemed to me that the other half was finished with what was even for dreams unusual speed. But the dream had probably been easier than the children had figured — or more distasteful.

As far as I remember, Headmaster Vaupel — of my schooldays — never dismissed us just because there was snow on the hills. On the other hand, I remember how he impressed us by a grand gesture — his permission to break three windowpanes before the rule against snowballing on the playground was enforced. Actually to get prior permission to encompass such destruction was, at least in my eyes, such an imposing expression of freedom that even now, so many years later, I carry it along with the picture of my deceased instructor. His face was not particularly mild and smiling, but in my memory he smiles, for I remember him standing on the

stairs in the first recess period and giving us this permission. That is perhaps the secret of creating a posthumous fame for oneself: to do and to say good things — and they must be unusual things that others will remember.

Who knows if my children's headmaster has not contributed to his own fame, present and posthumous, by today's holiday? At any rate they enjoyed it. It is not right to talk with food in your mouth, but this the children forgot in their eagerness to tell what they planned to do out there — when the lessons were finished. "Henrietta and Peter are coming over here when they have eaten lunch," said Kik. "I am going in with the little sled to fetch Mille and Tove," was the nonchalant remark of her eldest brother. I looked at him and began to think. In a couple of years he will be the young man of the house, who takes his father's automobile and calls for his girl friends. We'll soon be old, my dear friend! But what does it matter? If only he is a good boy, he may take both the auto and the sled for Mille and Tove, and whatever their names happen to be, all these sweet sixteens in their days of transition.

I believe they finally got together twelve or thirteen youngsters, and, not wishing their teacher to gain the only good reputation, I too gave a snow vacation to my farm students. In sunshine and

harmony the whole flock manned the two sleighs, and when it turned out that they were packed too closely for enjoyment, even for passengers of their age, three sleds were tied behind one of the big sleighs.

The sun was shining brightly and it was probably thawing more than a little when, with bells ringing, they drove out of the yard. What they did, and what they talked and shouted about in the two hours they were away, I don't know. It is altogether too long since I was that age for me to remember what one does and says when piled into a sleigh with, to be frank, only enough room for half as many as there are; and the sun is shining, and there is snow, and one has a holiday — and the lessons are done. But they looked very happy when they returned in time for refreshments, which were spread out in the yard; and Elizabeth Arden and other beauty experts can go home and lie down! There was no call for their accessories. Sun and snow and lightheartedness know much better what is becoming; and those will have to be very beautiful eyes which they cannot make still more irresistible.

The current tragedy — big or little — is that Muggi was run over by an automobile truck which broke one of his front legs. Hastily he was driven to the veterinarian and had his leg put in splints of

cigar-box pieces. Poor Muggi, it is not an easy matter to have to lie still in one's basket for three weeks when one is a little, young and lighthearted spaniel. And can he, I wonder, refrain from biting the bandage into shreds?

Dear little Muggi, if God had not let the snow fall, and the teacher had not been such a delightful fellow and given the children a holiday, and you had not tried to obey the whistling both from the sleigh and from the girl who stood in the ditch, then you would not have been run down by that truck. Yes, or if the mother to all of us had been at home. For then you would not have been permitted to run barking after the sleigh when the celebrants drove out of the yard. If you are the least bit philosophical — which I sometimes think you are — you will probably reflect, as you lie there for three weeks, how strangely everything is connected with everything else. And when you are well again and someone invites you to grumble in a corner, you will say that you cannot spare the time because the sun is shining and life is so full of joy; and one never knows what day is one's last.

MUGGI IS SAD

The garden is green and yellow and blue; the snowdrops stand in little clusters and whisper about spring. Yesterday it was foggy and gray. Last night it froze, so that we could not plow this morning. And now it is pouring rain.

But the air is fresh, and in raincoat and rubber boots I start with one of the dogs for a walk over the fields. Muggi is still limping along on three legs after being run over by an auto truck two weeks ago. He ought to lie still in his basket, but that, of course, is impossible for him. He had been laid up only a week when he began to support himself on his splinted and bandaged leg; and now he wants to accompany me through the fields. But that, I think, is going too far, and I order him to stay at home. But even after I have made every effort

to explain my reason, he does not understand. And I don't think you could find a more sublime expression of unsatisfied devotion than that in this little spaniel's sorrowful eyes as he stands on the steps and has been made to understand that that is as far as he may go.

When I was eight years old my father's farm burned, and until it was rebuilt we lived in a villa about a mile and a half away. Every morning father arose at six to go to the farm and start the men working; and every morning I awoke with that same unquenchable desire to go with him — the same sort of desire, I imagine, as Muggi has to go with me. I don't know what the feeling is called, but when I see Muggi's pleading eyes I can recall it and how it drove everything else from my mind.

If these morning trips to the farm had been pleasant one could understand an eight year old boy's desire for them. But they were not. Their sole feature was that then I walked alone with my father. Whether as a rule he cared for my company or even noticed my presence has never been cleared up in my mind. As I remember it, we never even spoke to each other. He had plenty to think about and was oblivious of me. And that I was glad of, for I feared that if I attracted his attention I would be sent home. I just walked beside him or followed at his heels and enjoyed it; but always in

fear of his becoming aware of me and conscious of his duty to see that an eight year old boy got sufficient sleep in the morning.

Father was at that hour what you might call "morning sour" and occasionally he could be very temperamental before breakfast; at best he was not a pleasant companion for a morning walk. But then I did not accompany him to be amused but simply because it was not possible for me to do otherwise. The desire for these walks was like a burning thirst, and I have often wondered since if father understood what they meant to me, and how primitive a desire it was which drove his little son quietly to crawl out of bed morning after morning, sick with the fear of being discovered and stopped, just to walk silently at his heels, as unnoticed as a dog that follows his master.

Some mornings mother awoke and forbade me to get up — without realizing what she did. Some days father sent me home again, when his disposition was not at its best — and by the next moment had forgotten me. By an effort I can still recall the sudden onrush of despair when I again crawled into bed. If ever in my life my feelings were invaded and obstacles laid against their development, it was in those months of my eighth year.

Memories of my resigned suffering at those times, and the kindred feeling later when the demands of

convenience or when other people prevented me from acting on some primitive, intense desire have taught me to understand something of what the psychoanalysts call repressions and the attendant complexes. And my parents' ignorance then of what was going on in the mind of an eight year old boy has shown me what suffering can occur without the knowledge of even good and understanding people. These things can happen because there are feelings which we have not named or catalogued, and which, even if we experience them, we cannot explain. Psychoanalysts say that to restrain such feelings endangers the spiritual well-being, and perhaps they are right. But, regardless of that, the memory of that eight year old boy often causes me to reflect on the actions of my own children and on the feelings behind them. And I endeavor to refrain from putting any restraint upon their desires unless there is a good reason for it.

And should I occasionally, taken up with my thoughts, forget this, the vision of a little dog on the steps, grieved to the heart, reminds me of the little boy of eight years who crawled back under the quilts and cried.

But who, curiously enough, did not know why he cried.

WINTER SLEEP

Is it spring or is it merely the earth turning over in her winter sleep?

The day before yesterday the sun shone, and when the boys came home from school they declared it was frightfully hot and asked if they might not discard their coats when they went out to play. Being responsible for their health in their mother's absence, I said "No," though I confess that I had that same spring feeling. My forenoon walk had made me warm, and on coming back I drank from a little brook in the woods. Below the brook I noticed tiny green plants — I don't know their name — and I felt the sun warm beneath the leafless trees. Only the young beech trees stood rustling the withered leaves which do not fall until the new leaves break through.

Is it too early to look for anemones? Should I go down to the little lake in the woods, where the fir tree hangs out over the cliff and water trickles from the ground, where the sun feels as warm as if you were in a hothouse? Every spring I find there the first anemones, pushing up bent stems through the moss-covered soil. Once they get through they turn their bright and happy faces to the sun.

No, it must be too early to look for anemones! I must not make a fool of myself before the ducks that sit quacking on the lake, before the fox and the badger who come nightly there to drink — though the badgers probably are still in their winter sleep if they are not making ready for the young ones which will soon arrive. And what would the squirrel think of me if I waded through the swamp to look for anemones just because the sun takes a notion to shine on a February day?

Well, I won't; and I hurry home, and I catch myself longing for my big chair and the book I have just begun.

Then the boys come in and tell me it is spring, and when I answer them, it is obvious I have entirely forgotten all I had just seen and felt in the woods. Ole — the elder — is at an age when he is all set to disagree with his father, and on such occasions as this he can become quite provoked because his old-fashioned and ossified parent seems

bent on making life disagreeable for a healthy, intelligent boy just past thirteen.

Everything that is boring — duty, a sense of order, for instance — he sees personified in his father. He doesn't know how badly the part fits me. He doesn't know how I recognize from my own boyhood every disappointed look, every offended air and every hopeless shrug of the shoulders. I never utter a " no " that has not some time sounded in my own ears; and he has thought nothing about me that I did not think about my father.

That spontaneous will to rebel which I read in his walk and in the toss of his head as he turns his back on me and goes away is the trueborn child of the one my father saw twenty-five years ago when, angry and disappointed, I turned my back on him. All of us try, no doubt, to bring up our children more wisely than we were brought up; but often, if there is a difference, it is for the worse.

" Svend is here, and he is permitted to leave off his coat," was Ole's last appeal to my common sense. As a matter of fact, my younger son had long since gone out — and wearing his coat. Now Ole followed, and his back told me a good deal about a boy who twenty-five years ago had found that his father was unreasonably severe and lacking in good sense. I sat by the window and saw the boys holding a consultation in the yard. Some-

thing had to be done to celebrate the sun and the spring and to demonstrate against that ridiculous injunction. Then they disappeared, and I found other things to think about.

Before afternoon coffee I took a walk in the paddock by the lake, and there I found the boys. My two had their coats on. They had pitched their tent under the alders and were playing summer camping.

As I approached, smiling, Ole tried to look sulky — one must show a firm face to one's father — but a smile lurked in the corners of his mouth, struggling to show itself. As I put my arm about him and whispered, "Father's big angry boy?" . . . his face beamed and tears stood in his eyes, so that he had to turn away lest the others notice it. Spring — what a beautiful time!

Yesterday the sun did not shine — we had an ice-cold storm with snow, almost the worst weather in a generation. I drove some thirty miles in the afternoon during the most wretched part of it. Along the roads through the woods, trees by the hundred had been blown down. I could make no more than ten miles an hour, and the windshield was coated with ice and snow.

It was, after all, no awakening — only the earth turning over in her sleep!

EASTER EVE

In my wood the oaks and young beeches have kept their leaves the whole winter through. The leaves have shriveled and the wind rattles them with such a sound as the blackbird makes when he hops about picking up food on the ground. However, the wind has not been able to detach them. When the snow lay everywhere else the ground remained bare under these branches and game birds sought the shelter of their interwoven roof. The snow burdened the leaves with all its weight, and the frost — which in autumn can cause the leaves to fall by the thousand when the morning sun breaks through — tried in vain to break the stalks of these leaves.

Meanwhile, I wonder what the withered leaves are thinking; I wonder whether they expect that the coming spring will give them sap and their

fresh green color again. Perhaps that is what they whisper about when the evening breeze plays with them and their dry voices sound through the woods together with the blackbird's song and the sighing in the tall spruces.

I believe it — almost. But that is perhaps because I am human. And men — especially the highly cultivated — are, as we know, afraid of death. We fight it and regard it as an enemy; and at last, when it is lost, we wonder perhaps why we troubled to make the fight.

If you have read Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* you will remember the old Chinese man who had his coffin brought into the room where he lay dying so that he might fall asleep in the knowledge that all was prepared. Isn't that beautiful? And isn't it more natural than the fear which causes us to sweep all thoughts of death out of our minds?

An old woman of my acquaintance knew that if she died without making her will, a flock of greedy relations with whom she had fought during her lifetime would scramble for her property. And although the thought was abhorrent to her, she could not bring herself to get to work on such a disquieting job as that of making her will. Doesn't that old Chinese show more greatness of spirit in his quietness and his desire to make ready for his journey?

It is that way with animals. Why do we almost never find dead animals in the woods? If they ran away from death we would always be finding their bodies here and there where it had overtaken them. But we don't. They do not flee before death and it does not frighten them. Their instinct tells them when it is on its way; and at the first sound of its quiet step behind them they leave all — their comrades, their kind, their wonted ways — and seek a lonely place for the great meeting. And when they have made a bed they hide their heads under their wings or they roll themselves up and close their eyes and fall asleep.

William Long tells of a cave he once found in a Canadian forest. The entrance was covered from within with branches and leaves which had been dragged there for the purpose. When he had removed them he found, on a bed of withered leaves, an old dead bear. The bear had heard death's footsteps behind him and had made ready for his last journey. The atmosphere of the cave was one of quietness, calm and peace. That is how animals die and that is why we so seldom see their dead bodies along our ways. And when we do see them it is when death has taken them by surprise. Crows which have been poisoned or animals which have been wounded and have not had time to find a lonely spot in which to die. Their natures and in-

stincts have not reckoned with either poison or guns.

Do the withered leaves of oaks and beeches, I wonder, really cling to life and hope that spring, the great painter, will give them their sap and their colors again? Perhaps they have no greater wish than just to fall and become earth once more and continue in that cycle, through earth, through roots, through sap, to the buds again, to reappear as new light green leaves on a spring day when the sun is shining.

I sat under the oak today as the withered leaves fell one by one. The frost was not to blame, for it was nine degrees above the freezing point. It was not the fault of the wind, for it was calm and the lake lay clear and unruffled. It was not the birds, hopping around and pulling the leaves off, for the blackbird which sat and laughed further in the wood was the only bird I could see.

No, it was the new buds, the new leaves, which push from behind—and the old ones must yield. Do they grieve over that? If we could but read their thoughts and understand what that sigh denotes as they lay themselves down here and there among the anemones on the ground under the trees. Yes, if we could!

But then we would sit all the time perhaps on the bench in the wood under the slope with the

fox burrows, or we would lie in the tall grass by the edge of the wood listening to its voices, instead of going to the fields and getting the grain sowed. The temptation is strong enough when one can conceive the language of nature only as a jargoning which one but half understands.

There is work in the fields today and it doesn't look to me as if we can get enough done. This is the time we should have more horses and more men. When I returned home from the fields this morning, after getting things started, I worried because I did not have at least one more horse that could pull the weeder, and another man. But the first thing that met my eye in the yard was the Icelander's shaggy head projecting from the half-door of the stable. He whinnied softly to attract my attention. There was a horse! And my eldest boy has his Easter vacation. Now the two of them can go out with the weeder, and I don't know who is the proudest and gladdest — the boy, the Icelander or the boy's father.

ALONE ON BOARD

Many things await a farmer when he comes back to his fields in late March after an absence. Everything, for instance, that pertains to early spring: work in the fields and ditches, cluck-cluck of running water, and under the water the thin spires of new grass thrusting themselves up — yes, and there is the first thin song of birds which seems to lie and vibrate on the air. It is apparently nowhere in particular — it merely is, or, as Ludwig Holstein put it, there are " bells which chime in the air."

Has it become more springlike in the last fortnight? It doesn't seem so. For during my absence there have been cold and rain and frost and hail continually. The lilac buds outside my window have become a little bit thicker and lighter in color, but otherwise everything seems about the same as when

I left. It was only this morning when I went out into the fields and heard a lark singing that I felt sure that spring was really on the way.

But I do hope the larks will not pick out a place to build their nests where we will be plowing or harrowing. Once I did harrow over a larks' nest. I saw it too late; and the whole morning I had to be a witness to the larks' sorrow. They rose high in the air and poised themselves over the place where their nest had been. And I could enter into their feelings, for everyone who has seen a larks' nest must understand how the builders love them and how they sorrow when they lose them.

But the two larks which sang this morning have as yet no nest and therefore no worries. So they can still sing gladly about the big bad wolf.

As a boy I often sailed alone at night on the Limfjord, and I remember one summer night skirting a neighboring island. Sailing on the other side of it was like being in foreign parts. The dark silhouette of the coast was quite different there from the coast line that faced our home. And wasn't the wind harder and the waves higher? I felt myself so absolutely alone and so independent. No power on earth, it seemed, could stop me from sailing whither I would and landing where I would. I was absolute master of that little twenty-foot ship and of myself.

By degrees it became almost dark and I steered by

the stars, while the lights from the town were shut off by the island's high coast line. And then from the darkness a fishing boat came sweeping close by, and in passing the helmsman shouted, "Are you alone on board?"

My answer could scarcely have reached him, for my sail flapped when I came alee of the larger boat; but when it passed into the darkness I felt more alone than ever.

It is delightful to be alone on board, but when you are seventeen years old and very romantic you could wish all the same for somebody to be sitting beside you on the thwart, somebody for whom you could feel responsibility, somebody in whose eyes, even on a dark summer night, you could read admiration for your seamanship when, fearing that the boat can no longer carry all her sail, you run her up in the wind and with lightning speed gather in the flapping topsail before it has again had a chance to catch the wind. Yes, there are a thousand things and an endless flow of small words which can please a seventeen year old boy in a boat on a summer night when a young girl is sitting by his side whose fate, in more than one sense, is committed to his hands as a holy chalice to be guarded and kept.

But perhaps very little is said on such a night, and perhaps the more its participants care for each other

the less is said — just as people, when they are older, behave before a common sorrow. But as the silence in sorrow which enfolds the same thoughts can unite people in an extraordinary way, so can even the small, scattered words spoken in a loving voice on the water on a summer night weave a strong enchantment around two young people.

But I was alone on board, alone with my dreams, dreams toward which, twenty years after, I can turn a melancholy smile.

A few days later we had guests, and I had to take a youthful party for a sail. We were twelve on board, and they were exuberant, happy, and enjoyed themselves hugely when the wind threw the boat so far over that the running deck was under water.

But their careless acceptance of my seamanship became too much for a seventeen year old boy. Twelve human lives — the responsibility was too much for such youthful shoulders, and when we reached the banks where the seas were higher and the wind stronger I turned and sailed home — under the protest of the passengers. They said I was afraid. I was afraid, but of the responsibility, not of the waves, and I wished indeed that, as on the other night, I had been alone on board.

Since then I have often thought of the boy who sat holding the rudder of that little boat with those

carefree people around him, sobered by responsibility because he was not alone. Agriculture is the poor boat I have chosen for my life's voyage, and it is good enough to have on board those who belong to me. But when the weather is bad — as it is now — I can still long for the old summer night when I sailed alone. And I catch myself sitting and dreaming of the course I might hold if I were alone. How I would haul the sheet tight and lay my course up into the wind! What delight I would take in the spray that was flung from the bow and the seething of the water from the shrouds on my lee.

And if things went wrong, what of it? You can always swim to land or sit astride your keel until daylight, until a boat comes and someone shouts, "Were you alone on board?"

EARLY SPRING

It is warm in the middle of the day when the sun shines, but the weather is up to mischief — enticing the little inexperienced flowers to come out and the straining buds to open. They accept the invitation and spend the warm hours jesting about the old and experienced plants that are still sleeping in their somewhat weather-worn winter garments. But when night falls, yes, even when dusk falls, and the sun goes down, all the young upstarts must weep for their folly, and the icy tears hang from their cheeks and their dainty light green frocks.

The spring flowers are no wiser than a young girl whose new frock is hanging in the closet, who hurries to don it for a stroll on the first warm sunshiny day. Does it do any good if we old ones warn her? For centuries thousands of warnings, millions of words, have been wasted in relaying to

youth our experiences of winter and spring, cold and warmth. But the young — and probably the best among them at that — insist on having their own experiences. Still, we old fools never stop giving advice to those we love, whose welfare we have at heart. Our words are wasted — but nature, too, is wasteful. It sets us an example by pouring forth with both hands. We shall never learn selfishness or penuriousness from nature.

So, this early spring it is permitting buds to develop only to freeze. It lets flowers open only to be frostbitten and withered within a day. Yet it laughs gaily in the midday sun, carefree in the thought of its unlimited wealth. That some must fall and some survive is the decree of fate. Why does one individual die young and another, apparently more poorly equipped, survive? Not until we see it in the large do we fully realize nature's extravagance. Flowers and human beings have suffered the same fate since creation, and in nature and in eternity man is apparently no more important than a flower. With the same passing nod fate lets us wither and be forgotten.

On the hill the rye stands light green in the midday sun. It can endure the frost of the early spring nights by now, and in the day it can enjoy the warmth of the sun. Rye is hardy and easily pleased — Uncle Peter! Now how did I happen to think

of Uncle Peter — long since dead? Yes, it was the rye. It was Uncle Peter who talked to me about rye and discouraged me from planting it. He was a typical gentleman farmer of the nineties. Capable he was, with great plans, great profits — and great losses. Everything about him was large — his stature, his black beard, his voice when on early summer mornings he stood in the yard and sent his men to work. When he shouted they couldn't help trembling; but they liked him, at that.

He was like an Austrian nobleman of the period when little things were nonexistent. The period when love was an airy notion of which poets sang, or a backdrop for the scene in which officers played bloody dramas on the theme of their honor. How strangely remote now seems the time when the minor events of everyday life and its hard realities alike were ignored, were left to those who were born for nothing higher. We still find themes from this time in German films and in historical novels; in other realms it has long since been swept away by our democratic leveling. Let us not mourn its passing. Even now it puts us in a romantic and slightly hysterical mood when we meet its remains.

Together we used to walk over the fields, Uncle Peter and I; and now when I remember that he is dead I am seized with a sudden desire to talk to him.

"Is that wheat, the green over there on the hill?" he would ask.

"No, that is rye, you can't grow wheat on that hill."

"Are you really cultivating rye? But you don't thrash it, do you? That will never pay. Cut it up with the oats for the horses. It puts nothing in the bag anyway."

Oh, you men of big affairs! Here we are, your next generation, house-renters, gleaning grain from the fields. No straw is too small for us to stoop for and pick up; no piece of business too mean for us to go a long way to get it. And honor, is that of capital value in life? Is it not rather shoved back behind the wings, while love has stepped from behind the backdrop and is competing with materialism for the stellar role? And, on *your* honor, were you any happier than we are? Was not your gaiety, after all, begotten of your desire to forget? While our gaiety is being fed by realities as well as nourished by our dreams?

The rye stands green and close. A tenfold yield is what I see in my mind's eye, and that is enough to start me whistling gaily. Not a song about gold and honor, but a little melody I once heard a ragged skipper sing while his boat drifted on the stream one sunshiny spring day on the Rhine.

MELANCHOLY

Now I feel sure the birch will not bud just yet. Outside my window yellowhammer and chaffinch are hopping about in the snow. The farm hands have just driven by with a load of chaff, and grains and seeds have dropped from the bottom of the wagon to the snow. That's what the birds are so busy picking up while they have the chance.

I wonder if the birds have not seen the round, gray head of a cat sticking out from behind the half open garage door. That's Nimblepaws — all the cats here on the farm have names — and his eyes are big and round with excitement over the birds that hop about so unconcernedly a few feet away. Shall he risk the jump? Time and again he measures the distance and decides to jump if one of them gets as close as the straw that lies in the snow midway

between them. Then one of the birds picks a kernel from the straw — immediately the cat jumps and pounces with outstretched forepaws. The bird clears them by an inch and joins his fellows in the linden.

Nimblepaws sits a while looking up into the tree, then with dragging tail slinks back to the garage. The birds watch him a moment, then fly a bit farther away where they are less likely to be attacked. There they hop about while Nimblepaws from his hiding place patiently keeps an eye on them.

The ground and all the roofs are covered with snow. There is no wind and the air is thick and gray. We expect more snow, and while we wait a strange oppressive mood is over all of us. Up in a peephole in one of the buildings the black cat sits mewing a melancholy greeting to an unknown friend with white paws — a friend about whom it is told that she has accomplished the trick of falling from a cellar up into a yard!

Yes, Trollcat, we others also are melancholy today and wretched thoughts about drafts and cold come in through all the cracks. And if we listen perhaps they whisper a verse we read, I don't remember when — long, long ago — a verse by Edith Rode: " The joy we did not win, which we lost and never found, that joy is the one that lives and shines and which we do not forget for the one we gained."

And with the little verse comes the recollection of a sunset by the water.

Last summer I walked one evening along the beach at Sondervig with a woman from a foreign country. She talked about love — no, it had nothing to do with me — it was only the subject which interested her and was forever in her mind. She was married, happy and contented, but as far as I could understand, crossing the path of her married life was a "fortune's beckoning youth in a boat" — "Jump, I will catch you and together we will sail to the shore of everlasting happiness!"

It was this man who constantly kept her thoughts revolving about the topic of love. Perhaps she discussed it also with others: I don't know. But with me she was always bringing it up, as she did this evening while we walked along the beach. I looked out over the water and my thoughts were many miles away from her. But suddenly she stopped, placed her hand on my arm and said, "Why don't you ever tell me your opinion of love?" The waves washed in over the beach, rolling over the gravel and leaving great bubbles in the froth that remained behind. Among all the little blue and green and brown pebbles one lay glittering wet and shining in the gleam from the sinking sun. "Look at that pebble," I said. "Yes, how beautiful it is," she exclaimed as she stooped and picked it up. And she

wrapped it in the handkerchief she was carrying in her hand.

We continued our walk while I told her a reminiscence from my childhood. When we reached a boat that had been pulled up on the beach, we sat down and looked out over the water. "You didn't tell me," she started. I smiled and said: "Let us again have a look at the shining pebble." She brought it out; it was dry, dull and colorless. I made figures in the sand with my cane.

"Such is the love you talk about. A shining wet pebble on the beach. We rejoice when we find it; we pick it up and hide it; but some day when we bring it out and look at it, it is not shiny but lies dry and dull in our hand. Let the pebbles lie and shine on the beach where the waves wash over them and preserve their luster. Do not pick them up if you don't wish to be disappointed."

She got up, went down to the water's edge and laid the pebble down again. She stood looking at it as a wave came rolling in over the beach. Not until the water had receded did she return to the boat. "Now it shines," she said sadly. "But what you say can't be right. I believe in love." "And you believed in the shining pebble," I said as I arose.

Before we drove back the long way home we sat on the sandbanks and looked out over the water which grew scarlet where the sun had sunk, and I

translated Edith Rode's poem for her and pointed out to her its illustration in the shining stone. As we got up to leave she said, quietly, "I think you are right."

Now it is snowing hard. The large white flakes fill the air with perpendicular white lines, and already the yard is covered by a thick white carpet. The sparrows have gone, but the pigeons wade around in the snow because the black cat is in the loft trap door where they sat a while ago picking grains. With flapping wings they try to get back through the thick air to the dovecot in the stable.

But we ourselves, whither do we fly?

BLUE ANEMONES

A cold wind is blowing over the fields today, and although the sun is shining on the lake, making the crests of the waves glitter like hammered silver, there is no sign or symptom of spring warmth. It is not April but March weather, even if the sun is doing its best to warm earth and air, our thoughts and our spirits.

The cold wind blowing over the ground goes straight through our clothes and we hurry to get into the woods where it is sheltered and warm. To come away from the blast and suddenly find oneself in the sun-warmed shelter of the woods is like jumping a whole month ahead. Here the air is still and mild; only the cold from the ground is like that from an ice-cold wall which a newly kindled stove has not yet warmed up.

But spring is near — the wood sorrel's partly unfolded leaves whisper it, the honeysuckle's small green tufts shout it to one another in their thin voices, and flocks of crows caw it out over the lake at sunrise. And down under the old leaves that cover the floor of the wood it bursts forth from the earth with yellow and green. Another month and all this new life will have pushed its way upward and the old leaves will be hidden under the new green carpet.

Today is " Forty Knights' " day — and I have a new little niece. It must be a good omen that forty knights stood watch by her cradle. And that today I have found the first anemones. In town, of course, spring flowers have been in the florists' windows for some time, so there the first anemones make no particular impression, but out here we get all the spring harbingers in their proper order and at the right time.

The anemones looked a little disheartened, but at least they were there, and the sun found them and caused the faintly rose petals to shine against the dark ground. The leaves were still like fine fringes which hung frozen on the stalks; but anemones were there — white anemones.

The blue ones we don't have in this region, and when people tell me they have seen them here I am sure they were really white ones to which some

soil condition had given a bluish cast. The real blue anemone I have never seen in this neighborhood; but I have known one, a very particular blue anemone, and I shall tell you about it.

In the spring of last year I walked alone in a wood in east Jutland which was full of blue anemones; and at the entrance I had seen a sign which forbade their being picked or dug up. Woods lying near large towns would undoubtedly be laid waste were it not for such prohibitions. So they ought always to be respected. But I was so terribly eager to have blue anemones in my woods. I was not certain they could grow there, but at any rate I wanted to try them out. Had it been merely for an allotment garden or a front yard I would never have disobeyed the notice. But my little wood is in a class by itself. A famous scientist once said it ought to be protected as a sanctuary for birds and insects. Doesn't that justify my digging up a little clump of blue anemones in a wood when there were thousands of them?

At any rate I did. But even as I stood with the clump in my hand, looking at it, right behind me a warden cleared his throat. I don't know what a boy would have done in my place, but I can remember that as a boy I cut off a branch that had been completely wound up in a spiral of honeysuckle. That time too a warden came along and

" bawled me out." I cried a little and told him it was for the school natural history collection. I was let off and got the branch too. It may still be in the collection if the old beadle's wife hasn't used it for lighting up during some Christmas holiday.

It was either this recollection or some ancestral reminiscence which led me, on this later occasion, to say that it was my beloved who was so eager to have the blue anemones in her garden and had begged me to get her one. I said " my beloved " instead of " my wife," because it sounded more romantic and so would probably be more likely to move the heart of a forest warden.

" Is that she sitting over there? " he asked, already apparently disarmed. I looked up and noticed a young girl who sat dreaming on a bench near the edge of the woods. I dared not disappoint my questioner and said, " Yes."

" Well, then, take that bunch, but no more, and give her my regards," he said smiling, and walked off.

I should bring regards to the lady on the bench — and from him! I had no idea who she was, nor, for that matter, who he was. But it had to be done, in spite of my being very bashful before young girls. Be it said in her praise, however, that she made it easy for me; she was not bashful. I even suspect that her dreamy attitude on the bench

was a premeditated one, to surround herself with a certain interest for the — at long range young looking — man in among the trees. I made a clean breast of the whole affair and proposed to her that we divide the anemones — there was just one for each of us. And so for appearances' sake we left the woods together.

I planted the blue anemone in my wood, and to-day when I pushed away the withered leaves I found it with fresh leaves and thick buds. I wonder if the other half also will soon be in bloom.

A WREATH

It is Tuesday and the sun is shining. We set forth on this springlike morning to gather flowers for a wreath.

It is to be of the earliest wild spring flowers that push their way through the still cold and sleeping earth. In the midst of all that is dead and dark they stand forth like shining promises, breaking through the withered leaves as omens of a spring which is lying there hidden, waiting its time. And through those small, shining open windows the whisper ascends: "There is no death." He who thither inclines his ear hears the voices, the steps of all that is on its way. And if he has the seeing eye, he glimpses through the tips of the new green grass all the forms beneath it which await the resurrection. Not the black and white of sorrow greet him, but

the spring's manifold array of green and gold and blue.

Someone is dead. In the eyes of the many he was just a man like anyone else, limned in black and white. But for those who knew him he was a mind and soul, as variegated as the colors of spring. Everyone attributed to him his own color, but everyone saw that color as bright, for this man was a soldier in the army of light.

It is a melancholy thing to go out in the bright spring morning and seek flowers for this man's grave. The dew drips from the leaves of the trees, and the drops shine in the sun and fall like tiny meteors which are extinguished when they reach the earth and are sucked into it — their course is run.

But from that point it begins again, and the drop which falls on the earth and is received in its open embrace may fall gleaming on our forehead when we visit the woods next spring and watch the sunbeams which find their way down between the leafless branches.

What awaits it down there in the earth, and how it again finds its way to a sunny spot on a spring-wet branch, we none of us know. But surely we may be satisfied with knowing that spring does return, with knowing that everything which winter's cold and darkness has laid low will break forth again, be

warmed in the sun and delight mankind with form and color — perhaps other men than those who now go out into the sunlight filled with anticipations. For next year it may be we ourselves who have fallen like dewdrops into the earth, lit by the spring-time sun. But what of it? Everyone reaches his hour for farewell, everyone has his budding spring day. And even if there is left only a warm memory with those we have loved, a memory which can be like a scent of lavender from a bundle of letters on yellowing paper — well, it will be only so long until the spring sun calls us again to new life, to new gladness and to work for others. Hasn't it all in all, then, been worth while?

An English author has said that what happens when a man is buried is simply that the Lord has planted a seed in the garden of the resurrection. We have rejoiced in the flower, have sorrowed when it withered, but we must also think of the seed which lies in the earth and which, in a new spring, will fructify and bloom in a form even brighter — who knows?

But we are forgetting the wreath which we would make from the first wild flowers of the spring. There are still only a few, but they seem to come forward willingly. Large gold monkshood standing in tight clusters; here and there the still small, shy anemones, daisies hiding in the green grass, and

cowslips which have bloomed only in the sheltered thickets.

Is that really enough from which to braid a wreath? Out here in the woods and on the warm slopes it does not require many to make a picture of the spring that is on the way, but here they are, and they are set off against a background of green grass, just as hope is the green background against which bloom the flowers of the gladness of life.

So the foundation of this wreath shall be of grass.

On our way home through the wood voices call to us — not with sound but in odors and specks of blue in the level grass. "Take us," they whisper. They are violets. "Weren't we the favorite flowers of him for whom you are weaving your wreath?"

We pause and, stooping, pick the violets.

This is no splendid wreath, it is only a humble tribute. But it is a modest resurrection greeting on a green background of hope.

ALONE, ALL ALONE

From my open window I look down over the garden where the apple trees are now beginning to bloom. The lawn gleams with the gold of what you call dandelions but what we call devil's milk-pails. There are more and more of them every year, and round the middle of May when they are in full bloom I always promise to get rid of them next year. On account of the early spring my promise for this year was made a fortnight sooner than usual; but I noticed that it was received with just as much skepticism as it has been in years past.

Women are fundamentally lacking in real imagination.

Why, for instance, could not this honorably meant promise conjure up a vision of a new, soft, smooth lawn which old Niels could mow Saturdays

and where we could drink coffee Sundays, sitting at a white table on newly painted benches?

Is it because my promise was not kept last year and the year before — to say nothing of a whole series of previous years? But that is no ground for skepticism this year. I have been on my own as a farmer now for fifteen years. And you needn't think that my farm has kept all its promises in that length of time. Rather, every year when spring came, when all was green, the grain sprouting, the cows going to grass and their milk getting as yellow as butter — every year, I say, this farm has simply filled my ears with promises, promises of full barns and pails, of the gaining at length of my reward for my steadfast affection, promises that all earlier disappointments were over and done with. When the storks learned to fly, it whispered, they would look over fields just bulging with their golden grain. Look, how clean the fields are! Where do you see wild cabbage, thistle and coltsfoot? I have given them all into your hand, so your grain can spread unhindered over the fields.

And when in the evening after working hours I have gone over the fields, I have heard these promises every year with a new joy and a new faith. And if from the depths of my being a voice whispered that I had heard all that before, it was only

a moment until my optimistic disposition found good grounds for assuming that this year the promises would be kept.

Everything had been so much better this year than last. Weren't the fields plowed, harrowed and sown better than ever before, and hadn't the sun and rain behaved exactly as they should? And had the larks ever built their nests in thicker clover than they had this year, and had the swallows ever hunted in the evenings over better rye fields than ours? Why shouldn't I, then, in view of all this, wave cares aside?

And yet — isn't the lawn still full of dandelions? It is a pity, but if I can still believe in promises, can still keep up my joy in living and my courage for another year when the spring comes with new promises and new hope — what does it matter?

What's more — but this had better not be said aloud for it sounds like a lame excuse — don't the dandelions really look charming when at midday they have spread themselves out to the sun and have strewn the green lawn with their golden stars? The women of the house don't like to hear me say that; they prefer the garden when, in the evening, the dandelions have folded their flowers and hidden their golden lights in modest green cups. No, women have no imagination.

The Swedish poet Karlfeld wrote once that

> When the meadows are in flower
> Maidens long for lover's hour

— but I wonder if that is true. I wonder if this Karlfeld really had any understanding of women whatsoever. Several of Fridolin's songs are in a quite different vein. I wonder if we men are not far more sentimental, say when the beeches begin to bud, than are women. They talk more than we do about the beauty of the sight, but don't they immediately turn their thoughts to the vase standing on the piano at home, to the new curtains in the sunroom, to the baker's and butcher's bills? And isn't their very next remark something equivalent to a box on the ear of the dreamer by their side? Not that I blame them for that. Without such a jolt occasionally we would all lose our way in the forest of our dreams.

But it is a good thing all the same, whatever is responsible for it, that we every so often long to run off there, alone, all alone.

ABOUT A TENT

It rained in the night and in the morning I awakened to a shining sun. I drew in the fragrance of the warm wet earth when I pulled aside the curtain and looked out of the window. I must get out and watch the turnips today — for this is the sort of day on which you can even see them grow! But as I was thinking that, up the stairs came the children, barefooted and in their pajamas. Today is the youngest one's birthday. He has attained twelve years. On a little table in our room are his gifts. All three children look sleepy around the eyes, but of course they had to wake early — to see the gifts. They are especially curious over a package that came yesterday. So now they all sit on a big bed and the mysterious package is put on the counterpane in front of the celebrant. How shall

he proceed? He inspects yesterday's arrival and impatiently undoes the knots. Why do birthday packages, by the way, always have so many?

It is a new and larger tent! He has with the years become a *grand seigneur* who with a gesture invites guests to spend the night in his tent out by the lake. And his friends from town were proud and happy when they set out from the garden in the two canoes with the tent, furnishings, bedclothes and provisions to sail to the camping ground. I always had a suspicion that it would have been quicker to go around by the shore, but I admit that was an absurd thought, as long as they could sail and the canoes were right at hand. And wasn't that boy proud when he sailed ahead with the heaviest things in the big blue canoe and his guests followed in his wake in the smaller canoe loaded with all the odds and ends! He would always sing the canoe song from Knud Rasmussen's sound picture. And how the eyes of his guests sparkled!

But that tent was not adequate for rainy weather and so now he has a new one. That raises the question of what to do with the old one. Should he use it for a supply tent or should he sell it for fifty cents to his playmate Hans, the stableman's son? He intimates that he would like to discuss the question with me.

When I was a little boy I heard my grandfather say to a friend, another old country gentleman, "Let us never become so poor that one of us cannot give the other a cow." I do not know if it was that or my father's example which, from my childhood, instilled the same idea, but it has always seemed to me that to sell something cheaply to a friend is a beggarly action. Give it to him if you can spare it and he can use it. But if you have to sell it ask a price that represents its full value. What makes anything else so disgusting is that it puts a price on friendship; the price of the reduction made by the seller. What sort of friendship is that: so many dollars' worth?

A wise man once said that he who held a friend by one hand held Allah by the other. Can you see any place for a cheap cow in a relation like that? No, let none of us become too poor to give the other fellow a cow.

I recently had a letter from a lady to whom I had given pleasure without knowing that I did so. Had I known who she was I would have told her that her thanks reached me at a time when I needed, spiritually, to feel that nobody was too poor to "give me a cow." If one can feel Allah's hand in his when one holds the hand of a friend, why do we do it so seldom? "If you have warm thoughts, do not withhold a gentle word," we used to sing

when I was young. But somehow we could better afford it in those days. Life has since then so beaten its damnable economy into us that we not only weigh every penny in the hand before we give it up, but every friendly word, every sign of affection which might spread gladness where it fell, as if we were misers hiding them somewhere where they could not even draw interest. And propriety is quick to stamp approval on such conduct.

My dear boy, now achieving your twelfth birthday, if you want to cheer your father in his old age, never spare your kind words, even if propriety rewards you by clothing you in rags. For joy will clothe your soul in purple.

And meanwhile you will not sell that tent to Hans for fifty cents. Give it to him. You deserve that pleasure. He will take you by one hand and thank you, and you will feel Allah's clasp in the other.

CROW BABIES

Should a farmer at this season attempt to give a shut-in city dweller an accurate report of his hard-won victories he would have to write a daily letter. For one day the chestnuts have kindled their Christmas-tree candles, the next the briar behind the garden has blossomed and its sweet fragrance comes through the lilac hedge into the garden paths, and the third day the bend in the lake is filled with the water lilies' wine-red leaves, or the winged seeds of the aspen sail through the air like snowflakes. Every day gives fresh proof of the victory of summer.

And when the sun shines as warmly as it does today, and there is a good shower once a week, the situation changes so quickly that he who would follow it gets out of breath. To say nothing of

all the little things we do not see or don't pay attention to, but which have their own importance in their own little world. A farmer with his business to mind goes around wrapped in his own thoughts, and it is only when an arresting fragrance meets him or he hears a bird singing or his eye is caught by a beautiful scene that he gives a thought to all the life that is going on around him. And the little things are the very ones that seldom catch your eye.

My children notice much more than I do. Especially Kirsten, my little girl. She can get pale with anger when the boys begin to suggest our selling the farm and moving to Copenhagen. For the boys, automobiles, streetcars, Tivoli, the zoological gardens, the subway crossings for pedestrians and all the other attractions of the city are much more enticing than anything which farm life can offer them. But Kirsten sees red if it is suggested that we leave. The boys' interest in nature is based on nature's edible results. When the apple trees bloom my little girl always grieves because the blossoming season is so short; the boys complain because the apples will not be ripe until September.

A few days ago I was surprised to see the boys go for an evening walk in the woods, and I thought there must be something behind it. Sure enough, when they returned they had something hidden in

their blouses. Inquiry divulged the presence of two baby crows. They were almost ready to fly and they hissed and bit when you touched them. I may say that robbing birds' nests does not, as a rule, have my approval; but crows are nothing but winged robbers who hunt chickens in the poultry yard, trout spawn in the pond, and nestlings and young hares in the fields. So any rules protecting other birds do not apply to them — we are in a state of war. We shoot them on sight, and it would be a trifle inconsistent to protect their nests.

There were six young ones in the nest the boys had found. They had removed two under the loud protest of the parents. And always when you molest one crow his neighbors sound the alarm for all the crows in the county to take part in abusing the intruder. Scarcely had the boys appeared in the tree before the parent crows began to call upon their neighbors, and in a moment the air above them was black with the screaming birds. And when the boys started home with their booty, the whole winged army followed them.

There are certainly a number of animal lovers who will be vexed with me for not sending the boys back to the wood with the kidnaped birds. But I didn't do that; for young crows are easy to tame, and they become experts at eating from your hand and flying off and sitting in the kitchen win-

dow and shrieking when they are hungry. Furthermore — when you have once seen a flock of crows bite out the eyes of a baby hare or steal a little yellow chicken from the poultry yard, you would as willingly let loose two adders as two baby crows.

I knew that these two would fare well with us; they would get enough to eat and an education which would include sounder ethical instruction than their parents would have given them. And anyway the parents still had four baby bandits in their nest with which to console themselves. So my conscience was clear when I let the boys install the crows in an empty pigeon house in the stable and feed them cooked mackerel. Of course they wouldn't eat it, but bit and scratched right and left. When they repeated the same performance next morning we fed them by force. Then they discovered that cooked mackerel is not a half bad dish. But their ill nature evidently forbade them to betray the fact, and when they swallowed the pieces we put in their mouths they made ugly faces and tried to scratch us with their horribly sharp claws.

But by the end of the first day we had allayed their wrath to the extent that they no longer dissimulated their hunger. They gaped when we held a piece of fish in front of them, and swallowed it with every sign of satisfaction. You can imagine

how proud we were; and my eldest boy lightly swore the most solemn form of oath that before two days had passed he would have them standing on his shoulders and eating from his hand. He was promising too much — but if he had said eight days he would have made good. The crows still sit in their cage, but they hop up when they see us coming and they cry when we go. Crows are clever birds and they are quite handsome with their light blue eyes set in their black heads. Their parents have found out where they are and are visiting them all the time, exhorting them not to make peace with us. But the youngsters know us by this time better than do their parents. In a few days now we will be able to let them out in the yard, giving them their freedom. They'll stay here, and they will always notify us when they are hungry.

The women look on disapprovingly when we raid the larder of cake and things for the birds. And they ask — with some justification — what we think will happen when we begin to dine out under the lindens. Will the crows fall heir to our scraps or will it be the other way round?

THE ROSE

I have been sitting in the house all morning, reading Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. That may seem a ridiculous occupation for a farmer in the busiest days of spring, but, first, I may be a laughable sort of farmer, and, second, I have my own particular reasons for reading Hans Christian Andersen. Somewhere he has written about a rose-bush with such a delightful fragrance that whoever smelled it forgot all his cares. You can see, the way things have gone the last few years I have felt more and more the need of just such a bush, and therefore you cannot decently hold it against me if I seek information even on a busy spring day.

The flower garden is the responsibility of my wife and her gardener, but this special rose I imagine myself planting in a lonely spot in my wood.

I have such a spot where I retire when I want to be alone and listen to the birds sing and look over the ravines to the lake and the wood on its yonder side.

That is the place for my rosebush. While I was still on the path up the hill its fragrance would reach me and all life's difficulties and sorrows would begin to disappear. By the time I was sitting under it I should have forgotten them.

But where do you find such a rose? No gardening authority has written on the subject — perhaps it does not seem fitting that we farmers should exorcise our sorrows by smelling roses when we ought to do it by cultivating apples; and perhaps the authorities are right. But all the same I would dearly like to know where one gets such a rose.

So that is why I have been sitting over Hans Christian Andersen. But you must not think that I am unaware of doing wrong, for while I paged eagerly through the five tattered volumes my conscience stood beside me and remonstrated with me for not being in my fields on such a day, seeing that those things were done which ought to be done. And at last the voice became too strong to resist; I laid the books aside, picked up my stick and went into the fields.

Every field here has a name; usually it is called after a student or a farm hand who has engraved his name upon the story of the farm or the special

field itself either by some notable piece of stupidity — and it is usually a stupidity — or by some illustrious good deed. Blunders may be very serviceable, especially on a farm where there are agricultural students. They can be used as school examples of how not to do things. The first year I farmed I kept a card index just for blunders, but gradually I ceased to use it, for just as in the whole world there is a limited number of jokes which are sprung again and again, with slight alterations, so there is a quite limited number of blunders which can be committed in the yearly calendar of a farm run under present conditions and with modern tools. If we farmers did not know them and therefore head most of them off, the whole list would be repeated in an eternal recurrence. When we give a pupil an order we must mentally consult our index, see which error can be committed in connection with that particular job — and warn accordingly.

I wrote once that every field has its own visage and every field its voice; but it is equally true that each has its memories. It will sometimes happen when I walk over the fields in a worried state of mind — and nowadays it is oftener than not — that suddenly I am conscious of a wave, not perhaps of gladness, but at least of peace, washing over me. And when I stop and ask myself why, it is an appreciable time before I find out; but slowly there

comes to mind something that once happened in that field and gave me pleasure at the time. For example: Here behind the farmyard lies a field which I drained off the first year I owned the place. One day when I stood talking to the foreman, my little boy came out with a letter containing very good news. I was crossing that field yesterday and felt suddenly such a warmth steal through me as one feels after the lightening of a great burden. I stopped; my dog looked up impatiently. "No, you will have to wait a little, for we must find out what sort of memory it is that is strong enough to rout my cares." . . . First came the foreman, then I saw the ditch which ran a way before turning off at an angle, and so appeared my boy . . . the letter . . . and presently the whole picture stood before me of that foggy morning with its sun just beginning to shine — at least it seemed to me that it was. That was during a difficult time — like the present — and I was care-ridden, even if, being younger, my mind was filled with illusions and I possessed an unshakeable faith that I sailed with Caesar and his star. What would matter the money we have lost if only we still had on board all that contraband of dreams and illusions? But life is a heartless taxgatherer who confiscates goods of all kinds; and the farmer who must lose his farm, and therefore his home, always leaves behind him more than can

be reckoned as loss or than can be transferred to someone else. All the dreams and imaginings, for example, which a particular man attached to a particular place, to its fields, its hills, its trees; dreams which no one else can dream. For just as a child is the fruit of the union of two individual persons, so a farmer's dreams are born of the union of parts of his personality with snatches of the song of the lark over his fields or with the willow's thick downy buds hanging over the brook. Others cannot dream those dreams even if the same trees stand there and the same birds sing over the nests. But gradually as we grow older our illusions are plucked from us as are petals from a flower; and if we do not find others, even of a more material character, our life is not worth the living. Is it not Schopenhauer who says somewhere, " Contentment is possible only through illusion "? That is true, but fortunately we become contented with illusions as we grow older.

I have lost many, and in this day we need them as never before. For now, work alone cannot turn the trick. There must be something on which to build hope: a handclasp, a look, or the fragrance of the rose which persuades us to forget all our sorrows.

A FAREWELL

The children have just returned from school. They dashed into the room to show me an engraved invitation from a twelve year old schoolmate, in which the young lady begged the pleasure of their company for dinner and a dance. "Isn't it ridiculous, daddy?" asked my little girl. She found both the tone of the card and the entertainment too formal for children of their age, and she proved to me once more that she is a wise child with a well defined instinct for what is natural and what is laughable.

As she and her older brother discussed the invitation, while I listened to them and the younger boy climbed up to get a bound volume of *Over Land and Sea*, a letter came which told me of the death of a dear friend in Algiers. It happens that

moments, which by their carefree irrelevancy seem doomed to be forgotten, come to dwell in your memory the rest of your life because they are interrupted by something one never forgets. Thus the moments I spent in my room with my children on a certain afternoon will live forever.

Quietly and seriously the children went out and left their mother and me to ourselves. Silent, we stood by the window and looked out into the garden where a blackbird sat pecking at the white snowberries. Drops of water hung on the branches, and as the bird hopped from branch to branch the drops fell to the ground.

Could it really be true that he was dead? . . . He and I, though separated by distance, had for many years followed similar paths, and when we met there was no human topic we could not discuss. Only a few days ago I had had a letter from him, breathing strange melancholy sunshine, like the sunshine that rests over his slim figure in the little snapshot standing on my bookcase. I took it many years ago at Bovbjerg as he stood on the furthermost slope — behind him lies the sea with foaming waves lit by the late afternoon sun. It seems to me that there has always been a peculiar sadness over his sunshine and his pleasures.

He was a farmer like ourselves, but he had learned more, read more and thought more than

is good for a man in our guild who hopes to win the confidence of his colleagues. He left the city and gave to farming all his strength and a half score of his best years. It repaid him poorly, as agriculture often does when you tackle it with a fund of too much professionally useless knowledge and with a mind open to values that are not of this world nor concerned with butter or bacon. Once your hand is on the plow and you would draw a straight furrow, you must not look up too long nor too often after drifting clouds; you must not be possessed by beautiful thoughts and ideals.

For how do we welcome the novices who present themselves to serve in the temple of Ceres and still have a volume of Homer hidden in their coat pocket? With suspicion and skepticism. We smile mischievously when in their eagerness to succeed they blunder and stumble. We shrug our shoulders when we discover that they steal time to read a chapter from the classics. Thus unsympathetic people smiled at him, though his every action bore witness to an upright and humble mind which respected the problems confronting it.

Yet, though a master, he never learned to wear the chains of office with dignity, never learned to give a command that made the earth tremble and refusal unthinkable. He was too humble, his personality too modest, and now his body has given

up, just as his mind years since fled from a brutal world of hard realities. But when all is said and done, the qualities he lacked were only those that belittle men in the eyes of Him who passes final judgment — the qualities we could lose to our own benefit.

No longer has he use for them, and who among us left behind is proud of not having surrendered as he has done?

Outside the blackbird is still hopping to and fro, but suddenly he catches sight of us behind the windowpane, looks at us a second with his yellow eyes, then flies away to the cypress where he runs along the ground and disappears in the shrubbery. Our eyes follow him for a moment, then wander out over the lake where the ducks rock on the tiny spring waves, while our thoughts go over land and sea to a town by the Mediterranean where the sun shines on men and women in summer garments. They chatter and laugh, carefree as though nothing had happened, while a gust of wind plays with the dust and a withered leaf.

But the lilac bush outside my window hangs full of heavy drops. One by one they fall, and, as we stand here with faraway gaze and sorrowful thoughts, dusk descends over the land — first among the bushes and trees in the garden and over the woods behind the lake. And in here, behind

the heavy dark blue curtains, it will soon be quite dark.

Only in the drops falling from the lilac does a little of the day still gleam; but the gleam is sad as of a tear that runs down a wrinkled cheek. . . .

GOD'S GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

Father, where do you think cats go when they die? "

"Why do you ask that? "

"Jytte has been gone for a week. The kittens have been longing for her; she hasn't brought them a mouse for a whole week. Don't you think she must be dead? "

"No, it's more likely that she thinks they are big enough by now to look after themselves and so she feels free to get out into the air and sleep under the roan tree. In fact I saw a little lair there only yesterday; it was just the size a cat would make. You must remember what a hard time she had looking after the kittens when they were small, so she really needs a breathing spell. She is probably living on the field mice — there are plenty of them."

Where does a cat go when it dies? For really I believe that Jytte is dead. She has always been a most loving mother. From the time she herself was quite little she had liked to lie on the radiator behind the piano. The sound of her feet on the keys when she jumped down to follow us into the dining room was the winter-long accompaniment to the stir of a whole family assembling for meals. But when she was expecting her kittens and prospecting for a suitable birthplace she deserted the radiator and for weeks we did not hear her playing the piano.

Then one evening she climbed the espalier and got into the boys' bedroom. At bedtime we found her there with her kittens. She accepted it patiently when we bundled the whole concern into a basket and she and her family found themselves in the bathroom where the ever open window allowed her to go out at will. Every day we heard her bringing mice to her children, and when she had delivered them she would lie in the sun on the window sill and watch the bushes where the birds were hopping about. Meanwhile the kittens would sit in the basket under the bathtub, one growling and holding on to the mouse in his mouth while the others sat in a circle around him angrily envious. The mouse could not be divided. The setup was an ideal illustration of the phrase: all or nothing.

But now there is no longer a mother to bring mice to her kittens. From time to time many of the children's four-footed friends have disappeared in the same sudden way. They sorrow over these events, at first with extraordinary intensity. But the silence of resignation follows soon. And of course I suffer for their sake, and at first I tried to console them by suggesting, for example, that a lost cat was just visiting a neighbor. But such attempts at consolation only made things worse when they had to face the fact.

I have often thought that children living in the country in communion with nature and animals are in a very definite way prepared for everything that can happen to them in the course of their lives. There are none of life's good or evil fortunes of which country children, in some way or other, are not forewarned. And if they are thoughtful and observant they can through their own experiences learn many useful lessons. Life's beginnings and life's endings almost burn themselves into their youthful, wondering eyes; and if you observe these children closely year after year, you can see how they gradually prepare themselves for all they will ever encounter of good and evil: to savor the gladness of life fully and richly; to bear sorrow without becoming embittered and without breaking; to

learn the beauty and the art of understanding which makes everything in life so incomparably easier.

An English author once wrote something about "the woman with God's gift of understanding." When I see my little girl's thoughtful eyes filled with something of the wonder with which life in the country is so rich, I always ask myself if we shall succeed in making her a woman with the "grace of understanding"!

That is scarcely a birthright. It must be forged out in the interaction of a woman's native abilities and her experiences during childhood and youth. And I wonder if there is any one thing that makes life more livable for a woman than just to have the grace of understanding. Certainly there is nothing that can make a man happier than to meet a woman with that gift; and for my part nothing gives me more pain than associating with women who lack it.

So, mixed with my sorrow over the friends my children lose, their disappointments and their times of sadness, is the hope that, taken all together, these experiences will coalesce, form a body of understanding — of things, of happenings and of men. Something which, with their own abilities and goodness of heart, will become what I have called God's gift of understanding.

The kittens which have lost their mother draw

closer to one another now, and they draw closer to my little girl. And it fills her with a happiness which shines in her eyes; when she comes home from school she visits them first thing. They know her step, and when she opens the door they lift their heads, are down in a minute from the window sill and rubbing against her leg.

And their weak "mew" — isn't that just their prayer to her to be their — woman with God's gift of understanding?

HOMECOMING

A long night's ride on the train, attempts to sleep in spite of the engine's whistle and the shunting of coaches, infinite fatigue during which the picture of a good bed which stands still haunts the imagination like a shining Fata Morgana. . . . And so at last a sun rising over dew-wet fields, and eyes whose heavy lids moment by moment threaten to shut it out. So you draw near home, and the fields and woods, the houses and roads are soon those old acquaintances which you have seen in all their seasons. Every sandy lane where the hands now drive the herds of brindled cows to grass, every road, has its memories, its name, which jump into your consciousness, perhaps with a feeling of vague discomfort for which, thinking back step by step, you try to assign a reason.

And while your thoughts churn sluggishly and you look with lackluster eyes through a dirty windowpane, the train approaches a station where someone is waving his cap and shouting a welcome home. How blessed then to get your hands on the wheel, to feel the pedals under your feet, and to know that you yourself have the say-so about the speed at which you travel.

I always drive too fast when I come home on such a morning after a few days' absence. The city streets have seemed so terribly ugly, the roads desolate and God-forsaken. Only when I reach the woods where squirrels run across my path, where wood pigeons coo and little birches glimmer in the morning sun with their light green leaves — only then do I begin to feel that the journey is over; but I do not fully realize it until the car pulls up under the lindens by the front door.

Then I am really home, for here I am welcomed by my dog who grins, shows his teeth, ties himself in knots from sheer joy. One of the cats lies curled up on the steps with an eye open to the first chance to slip into the living room. Its indifference to me is obvious. Nor is it for my benefit that the two cocks stage a crowing match on the dunghill behind the pigsty. But it sounds delightfully homelike nevertheless.

Has the front door become smaller? Or is it only

that the Virginia creeper is thicker and hangs further down over the door, so that you feel as if you were entering an arbor — the sort of thing celebrated by the poets of a generation ago but into which no self-respecting lover would lead his (pro tem) loved one today. We have two such structures in the garden, linden arbors with all the qualifications which could fairly be demanded thirty years ago. But do you think that anyone ever sits in them today? Not on your life!

I still remember the first summer that we had a regular flock of young people on summer vacation. And how carefully and discreetly I avoided these two temples of Venus. I might have saved myself the trouble. These young people had nothing to hide in the darkness of an arbor. Their conversations and actions were open to the observation of whosoever might be interested. Had it not been that songbirds had built their nests in the foliage these monuments of an earlier day's modesty would long since have been cleared away. As the knights and troubadours of the Renaissance needed their backgrounds of castles with niches, secret passages and decorative furnishings for their homage to women, so every age has its own harmony between outer circumstance and inner response. And the romantic, rather sultry linden arbor fills no function in the modern garden.

Does that mean that my front door too is utterly out of harmony with our contemporary taste for the simple? It has, I admit, an 1830 aspect, with its drooping tendrils and the hanging lantern half hidden in them. All the same it suits me admirably. But then I have always admired Gladstone collars and flowing ties, and in my day I have rationalized my aversion to descriptive geometry (and other sciences which depend on straight lines for their practice) by citing the fact that God did not create us square, indicating, of course, that he himself did not understand functionalism.

And for that matter, could one long for anything which was rectangular?

Longing is a strange feeling. It is like hunger. When a farmer has been away from his home he can feel a longing which does not seem to be connected with any particular person or thing. It has something to do with home, with the stables, the fields, the animals, the trees, the song of the birds. And the satisfaction of this longing may come spontaneously through some very little thing — a cat arching its back and rubbing against his leg as he stands in the stable, or the wingbeat of migratory birds heard on an autumn evening.

He may — the reader will forgive my saying so — be unaffected when he sees again his wife and children, while a swallow darting after midges in

the twilight can quicken his blood — without his knowing why. A spring homecoming is a homecoming to many things, good and bad, but after all the best part of it is when these winged overtones out of seeming trifles come to fill that inner void which is not homesickness but something else — which no one can explain.

IN THE FOG

I set out for the fields this morning in a heavy fog. I could hear the factory whistles calling people to work in the town. Here and there I could hear a wagon rumbling along a gravel road, and some geese quacked as they made for a pond. From the field where the farm hands were plowing I could hear their encouraging shouts to the horses, but I could not see them until I was almost upon them.

At the bend of the road I heard a footstep, and soon I saw dimly an object which rapidly defined itself. A man quite shabbily dressed and looking famished. We know the type, for a number of them hang out in an old barn near by. And though they have never done any harm, the women on my place do not like to meet them. I have tried to assure them that they have much more to fear from

seductive gentlemen in well tailored clothes than from these poor derelicts. But, strange to say, women have, along that line, a propensity to " live dangerously." There would be fewer tragedies in life it they didn't have it, but on the other hand, I suppose, there would be fewer spontaneous eruptions of " the grand passion."

The man who had now reached me was one of the worst examples of what one of my guests once characterized as the " lawless brood from the barn." Drink was obviously the only aim and meaning of his life. It was drink that dragged him ever and ever down, and it was drink he depended on to keep him up. As he reached me there in the fog all that I was conscious of was a picture of a pitiable human condition, such an apparition as causes some people to cross themselves pharisaically and others to bubble over with pity for a second, before they resume their way trying to shake off the impression.

He stopped me and told me that he had had nothing to eat since yesterday afternoon. Wouldn't I give him a dime? I noticed a flute protruding from his inside pocket.

" I will, if you will play something for me," I answered.

" What, out here in the road? "

" Yes, right here."

I am no judge of music. Once in a Copenhagen

church I slept while a virtuoso played Handel, and I have worked out problems in geometry while Herold sang Don Juan. On the other hand, I have wept over a little melody in C major to which no modern composer would put his name. I am color-blind in the field of music, but that doesn't mean that I don't enjoy its colors. It is only that the colors which appeal to me are not those for whose enjoyment sophisticated taste is necessary, but those which appeal to my own human feelings.

Perhaps the tones which this derelict coaxed from his flute would have seemed excruciating to a connoisseur. I don't pretend to know. For that matter they did not make any extraordinary impression on me; it was his face as he played that caught my attention. Didn't it alter? Didn't the deep furrows seem to smooth themselves out? And didn't a radiant light come into his dull eyes? At any rate, there was something strange in his face that had not been there before, and I could not help a feeling of admiration and perhaps a little envy to see this tramp suddenly ascend into a world that was closed to me. It was not that he could blow upon a pipe and move his fingers in such order as to produce a melody — no, but the feeling, the emotion I read in his eyes, the sense of music, something which money cannot buy and which cannot be taught — even if you live to be a hundred — but

whose possession depends on fate's cast of the dice when you are born.

I was physically clean, wore good clothes and went around in the protective mantle of my fellows' regard. All this the man before me lacked, but while he stood and played for me by the roadside I felt that in one respect I was infinitely poorer than he. Did he not have wings, however poor and rumpled, which could lift him to the clouds, while I must content myself with being a mere earth-bound spectator of his flight? And who could notice his wrinkled clothes when that light was in his eyes?

When the piece was finished he put his flute back in his pocket, and his face again took on that dog-like look which it had when we met. But I was not feeling so superior as I had been then. We were more like equals who had met in the fog; one of us happening to be wearing respectable clothes, the other happening to be carrying a flute. Indeed it sounded out of character when he again asked me for a dime for breakfast. I gave him fifty cents and caught myself wondering whether I should not be ashamed to give him so little. When he had effusively thanked me I said good-bye and left him. He will in all likelihood camp on my doorstep in the future, but he has taught me something which is well worth that.

When after this I meet people who, physically or

in the spirit, have wrinkled clothes and furrowed faces, may I never forget that they may somewhere conceal a flute with which they can conjure away the wrinkles and give wings to their souls — wings which I myself can never possess.

IN THE GARDEN

I don't know why, but I notice that my friends smile whenever I speak of my ability as a gardener. I can see — and I say it belligerently — nothing funny about it. If I am not only a progressive farmer but an actual innovator in horticulture, I deserve admiration. For after all it is rarely that one man exhibits several talents in this field. I don't say this boastingly, for I know very well that a man is not responsible for the talents he may possess. Such endowment is due partly to inheritance and partly to natural gift — though the distinction is perhaps a slight one unless you are dealing with your income tax schedule. There, of course, I use the first rubric, under which anything is tax free, while property under the second is treated as though both the receiver and the giver were enemies of society.

When I use the word innovator it is not because I want to put myself in the running with those who break records by producing horse-radish as thick as your arm, giant cabbageheads, or apples by the load. That, to my mind, is mere handicraft, far beneath the real art of gardening. Anyone can learn to do it. The only factors involved are work, patience and the proper soil. As I see it, ideas are what count, and, in all modesty, I may have a few which will prove helpful. But to go into that might lead us too far. One example is enough to show you just what I mean.

If you have a garden you have doubtless made the acquaintance of those nasty, slimy gray snails that hollow out strawberries. I have completely got rid of mine, but before I tell you how I did it, I must be assured that you don't entertain the silly notion that toads are to blame for this destruction of strawberries. As a child I thought so, and pursued the poor, innocent, gentle-eyed creatures. Children can be cruel, but among my early sins there is none I remember with more real sorrow than the one I committed against a toad which I caught among the strawberries. It was the result of my first biblical instruction, too — I crucified the toad. All the gruesome details are clear in my memory and I doubt if they will ever be washed out. I remember too that the visiting of punish-

ment on the toad did not give me the satisfaction I had anticipated and that for a long time I avoided the place of execution.

By this time I know that toads do not visit strawberry patches to eat the berries but to hunt the gray snails. Toads are slow hunters and are obliged to seek food among even slower creatures, or else I am sure they would leave the gray snails in peace, for you can hardly imagine a more unappetizing food.

Well, this year, when the gray snails have been unusually devastating, I have availed myself of the toads' fondness for them. I promised my children a bounty of a penny for every adult toad they could bring to me and within twenty-four hours they had brought in a score which I placed in a box. I left them there a day to work up an appetite. Then I tethered them in the berry patch, one to each row. The tether, you understand, is a string stretched the whole length of the row, and the toad is so attached that he can pass freely up and down but cannot wander far transversely. Goats are often tethered this way in a narrow ditch.

The toads caught the idea at once, and as they were almost starving they ate up every snail within reach. When they had cleaned up the first twenty rows we moved them to the next twenty, and so we went through the whole patch. In the course of two days they were fat to the point of bursting. I

put them in the box again and let them starve for twenty-four hours; then, with fresh appetite, they continued their work. And they are surprisingly conscientious animals, hoeing their rows at what for a toad is top speed.

Now the local strawberry season is over, and before turning the toads loose I offered to any of my gardening friends, express collect, a box of experienced toads — guaranteed to be hungry on arrival. I further offered to take back the package if undamaged, as per invoice. Nobody took me up; only my brother even bothered to answer me, and he made the condition that he send me a box of rats in exchange. I am not disturbed, of course, by this lack of understanding — think how much misunderstanding has greeted even such a man as Edison in the course of his inventive life.

We have at present a rather stoutly built girl on a holiday visit from Copenhagen who occasionally pretends to weed the kitchen garden beds, and I am seriously canvassing the idea of tethering her. For it seems that more currants and raspberries are disappearing than are weeds.

Or is it just my eyesight that is failing with the years?

IN THE RUSHES

I am afraid that my eldest son is showing a talent for business. Of course the boys are forbidden to trade while they are at school. Probably the authorities think that this continual trading of knives, stamps and other treasures of boyhood diverts attention from the ideals which the slightly moss-grown women teachers seek to instill. The position is well taken. Just one boy, bent on trade, can get a whole class worked up into a postage stamp excitement which will eclipse all other interests for several days.

But outside of school hours the young traders are given a free hand; and I must admit that I look upon the boys' business activity with a smiling envy. When one of them comes home and announces that he has swapped a penknife for a fish knife and ten

cents, I begin to feel bad, because when I was a boy in the country I did not have such rich opportunities for those experiences which we all have to go through sooner or later. I had only my brothers to exchange things with. And I was the youngest!

I was sitting in a wicker chair on the lawn one day at dinnertime, reading Helen Thomas' *Two Men*, when my eldest came running down in his blue bathing suit — about the only garment he wears after school hours. He was brown and sunburned and his eyes shone. "Father, guess what! The big pigeon has come back. That makes three times I've sold him, and every time I've got a quarter for him!"

"But look here, when you have sold him once he isn't yours any longer, so you cannot sell him again."

His face became serious; and I suddenly remembered a Christmas eve in my own childhood.

I was attending grammar school in Aarhus. Two companions and I discovered a cigar-vending machine where, for a quarter, you got a package containing three cigars and a nickel in change. The machine had no legitimate interest for us, for we didn't smoke; but it was out of order, and gave back not only the nickel in change but the quarter. So if you had a quarter to begin with you could empty the machine — cigars and change!

I had the necessary coin; and together we started business. When the machine was empty we divided the nickels and, as principal, I got the cigars as well. It occurred to none of us that we were guilty of the robbery of a vending machine; and as it was just before Christmas I took the cigars home, wrapped them in bright red paper, closed the package with sealing wax, decorated it with a little piece of spruce, and wrote on the package, "To Father."

Father was quite touched at the thought that his little boy had bought cigars for him, even if he did not hide the fact that their dampness and unequivocal seven-cent character rather upset him. I told him with great glee how cheaply I had procured them; and then a shadow came over father's face.

"That was not a proper way to treat a cigar seller. As long as you have not really bought them you have no right to them. You must promise father never to do a thing like that again."

"But isn't it his own fault if his machine is broken?"

"Even so that does not entitle you to take advantage of the situation."

And then, lifting me to his knee, father continued: "There is an old saying in west Jutland which runs: 'Not by luck and not through others' loss, but through your own diligence and clever-

ness shall you build your fortune.' Never forget that."

The picture of a little thirteen year old boy on his father's knee on Christmas eve stood before me again as I, middle-aged and gray, had to hurt my boy by telling him he had done wrong. And I had an ardent desire to be able to make this occasion as unforgettable and its lesson as grounded in his mind as the other, a generation ago, had been in mine. But how difficult that was going to be.

A child's mind is like a field of grain. Often we tramp over it blindly to pull up a single thistle or coltsfoot. If we do that early enough, when the grain is still small, we may get away with it. The grain can recover from the impact of our footsteps. But later we must be very careful how we tread, for we can so easily tramp down something that can never raise itself again.

"Would you like to go rowing with father?" We went down through the hazel path to the lake, untied the boat, and rowed out until we came to rest among the rushes, while my son talked at random of the fish he had caught and how the cats had eaten them, of his tame crow, of the storks which were hatching out their eggs.

We sat in the bottom of the boat where nobody — except One — could see us through the high rushes, and then I began to tell him about the boy

and the cigar machine and about that Christmas eve, and father's serious face. And I took care to point out that this matter of the pigeon was, of course, a much less serious business but that it nevertheless did mean his taking advantage of another's loss.

The lad has inherited a peculiarity from me — he is easily moved and shows it by getting tears in his eyes. It is a peculiarity which you will meet with among hardened criminals, so don't imagine that it has anything to do with one's goodness or wickedness. It is just a weakness, nothing else. So now you can picture the father and the son sitting in the bottom of their boat and crying, while the sun shines and the summer breeze plays with the surrounding rushes.

A NEW CAT

A strange cat has come to the farm. There is nothing remarkable in that; it happens often. But the remarkable thing about this cat is that it appears to feel very much at home.

A day or two ago it came in through the open window of the children's room. There it sat when the children went in, and instead of running away it rose and arched its back against the window frame. The children stood as if hypnotized, still as mice, for fear it should run away. But instead it jumped down on one of the beds, stuck a chop-shaped leg up in the air, and began to wash its stomach. One of the children carefully slipped over to close the window lest the miracle should disappear. Then they quietly surrounded it and one of them ventured to stroke its gray fur. Far from being afraid, it turned over on its back, twisted around with its

four feet in the air, and indulged in an incredibly wide yawn.

In a moment all three children were upon it, fondling it — as much as was possible when six small hands sought for room on the coat of one cat. But when the first happy excitement was over the question of ownership came up. One had seen it first; one had stroked it first; and one had opened the window through which it had climbed in. And then the younger boy drew attention to the fact that his gray cat, Opoleon, had disappeared during the winter, and that this one must surely be Opoleon come back.

I can remember when Opoleon disappeared. It was early last winter, the evening before we were to dine on roast hare with a friend whose shooting ground I know and would swear is quite free of hares. Rarely if ever do hares sit upon a fence meowing; and furthermore, my friend — to put it mildly — does not shoot well. But roast hare we had, and Opoleon has been missing ever since — not that I would have the temerity to suggest that there is any connection between the two incidents.

But now the question was raised whether this could be Opoleon who had returned. The cat's familiar behavior strongly indicated it, as well as its way of sticking its legs in the air. True, there was the color! Opoleon was dark gray, while

this one was light gray. Had anyone ever heard of a cat's changing color? The younger boy held to his theory, and suddenly all three rushed off to ask the housekeeper if she also did not agree that Opoleon had returned.

That prosaic soul naturally did not think so, and warned them to be careful with strange cats. One never knew. . . . But the children were already headed for my room, bringing the cat. They would lay the problem before me. I am glad to be able to report that their confidence in their father's sound judgment was not disappointed. For I gave it as my opinion that this was really Opoleon, and that he had been away just to get himself a new coat.

They looked at me with beaming eyes and tried to find out if I actually meant it. I elaborated: an utterly strange cat naturally would not behave as this one did, and when one read novels about a man's hair turning white in a single night, might not a cat that hung around a haunted mill find its coat lighter in shade after a couple of months?

" Do you think he's had some awful experiences, daddy? " asked Kirsten, my little girl, who reads so voraciously.

I reassured her by pointing out that since Opoleon's fur had not become completely white the experience could not have been so bad, after all.

Then my wife came in and spoiled it all by scolding the lot of us. The children because they were not more faithful to the memory of Opoleon than immediately to throw themselves into the arms of a new cat that came through the window; and me because I endorsed their faithlessness.

How difficult it is to bring up children! Had not this problem, for example, a slightly wider horizon than my wife saw? Is it certain that unfaithfulness to the dead comrade allowed the children to rejoice over the new one? Was not their welcome of the new friend, on the contrary, a tribute to the memory of the missing one? When a widow does not marry again, is that a proof of faithfulness, or is it evidence that she has had enough of married life?

Had the children disliked the old cat they would hardly have fondled the new one so tenderly. And, as I saw it, every caress it received was also a caress for the one who was dead. Beneath the fur, be it light or dark, lies, of course, the thing we care for — call it mind, call it soul, it is all the same. The exterior is but an idol behind which we behold that which really matters, that for which we care.

And when the children saw under the light coat that which they had once found under the dark one, was it not really faithfulness that led them to lavish caresses on it?

THE PICTURE

Some days ago I explored the great empty rooms of a spacious old country house. It must have had fifty rooms, now left to the dust which lay on the marble chimney pieces and in the deep window recesses. I went from room to room, and every time I opened a door I marveled at the emptiness. No furniture, no window curtains, and no people to look out into the park through the high windows with the small panes. No one to stand leaning against the chimney piece and warm his hands at the fire; none who talked and filled the rooms with their voices.

It was morning and the sun shone on the park, with its overgrown and untended lawns and flower beds, and in through the dusty windowpanes. The place was empty but it seemed as if all the big rooms,

when the sun looked into them, awakened to a new expectation, an expectation that something was about to happen, that the day would restore their life. That people would come again and talk with one another, set furniture in place and hang thick curtains behind the high windows. For the rooms remembered how they had once looked and what kind of life had once gone on within their walls. And when the sun shone the rooms gleamed in silent hope.

The sun went its way, and when it had shone on all three walls and got the three great white enameled doors to reflect its beams, it sank slowly behind the trees which stood over a few old graves. I knew this because after sunset I went again through the empty rooms. But I do not know what it was that drew me from one to another. It was as if I were in a temple where the fragrance of memories drifted like incense, lulling and inveigling one from room to room. It seemed as if I could never absorb enough of all this emptiness.

I went up the great staircase to the rooms above, and my steps echoed through the whole of the empty house. The second-floor rooms were evidently bedrooms; they were as empty as all the others, but they were not so large and therefore seemed more homelike in spite of the emptiness. In one, which looked over the park with its neglected

rhododendron beds, arborvitae and old walnut trees, the last rays of the sun found their way to a corner where once a writing table must have stood — at least I would have chosen that corner for mine; there you could bury yourself in your thoughts without being disturbed. And right over that spot there was a picture still hanging on the wall! Was there really a picture there? Yes, it was a large photograph of a young woman, with dark hair parted on the side. And around her neck she wore a string of large, dull pearls. Beautiful she certainly must have been, and when she looked at one with those dark eyes, calmly and with a glance as soft as velvet, surely most men must have dropped their eyes, feeling like one who takes off his shoes in a holy place.

As a boy I once fell in love with a picture of Beatrice Cenci and I read everything about her I could get hold of. I was angry at the later authors who tried to show that her beautiful, innocent eyes lied as deeply as women's eyes could in the most corrupt days of the Middle Ages. I simply refused to believe any evil of her. It must have been her reprobate father who put the innocent girl in prison. But all this — in my eyes — false witness nevertheless dropped its poison into my mind; and I remember that when a friend admired her portrait on my wall I recounted to him all the evil I

had heard reported of her. But I felt afterward as if I had betrayed her, and my conscience is still sore on the point because I sowed the seeds of distrust of her in his mind.

Now I stood in a great, old, empty house and found a picture on which the sun's last rays were lingering, whose glance rested on me as peacefully and almost sublimely as the look which our poet I. P. Jacobsen found in a picture in Florence.

I am older now than the boy who fell in love with Beatrice Cenci, and life has taught me that people are never wholly good and never wholly bad, and that the photographer who knows his art opens his shutter when the sitter's expression interprets his best qualities. But I must admit that I was fascinated by this picture. Had I seen it in a photographer's window in the city I might not have given it a thought; but here, where it was the only object left in an empty house, and one which the sun's rays had searched for and found at last . . . well, it seems I am not any older after all.

But how did it happen to be hanging there? Who left it in a vacated house? Was it accidental or did whoever sat at the writing table and looked into those dark eyes leave it there in cold blood when he moved out. The dust lay thick on its narrow mahogany frame. I wiped it carefully and then went to the window and looked out into the

park. It was beginning to get dark and soon from behind the wood I heard the ringing of the evening bell as the sun went down. The caretaker's dog barked at some people on the road. It was time to drive home.

I turned and looked into the empty room. The walls seemed to be more nearly alive now. It seemed as if the darkness which now began to fill the empty rooms endowed them with life again. The past began to whisper; and what does the past talk about in an old house? Of evil, of malevolent people — it is always they who call most loudly and whose voices the empty walls remember best. Think of leaving her there on the wall to be alone in such an atmosphere the whole night through. I looked again into the beautiful eyes which seemed silently to rest on mine. Did it not appear in the twilight as if there were a prayer in them?

When the door closed after me, the last wall in the house was also empty.

TRANSIENTS

We have just waved good-bye to two young women who are disappearing behind the woods on the far side of the lake.

They came on their bicycles one evening last week, drenched and weary, and asked permission to sleep in the hayloft. I looked them over. Rain dripped from the pointed tip of one girl's nose, and straggling ends of her Abyssinian hair strayed wet and curly from under her beret. If her eyes had not shone with mischief you would have been irresistibly reminded of a wet sparrow. In spite of her drenched appearance she made a favorable impression. As the other one moved a bit and water squelched in her shoe, they both burst into an irrepressible laugh. *Que faire?*

Of course I thought at once of the guest room

with the two white beds. And I thought of the rhubarb pudding in the kitchen and of hot coffee and of other things. And then, of course, there had to echo in my ears the reproachful words of an old well-meaning friend who had once found that he was not by any means to be the only guest: "I say, this farm of yours is more like a hotel."

Is a farmer justified in running a free hotel these days? Certainly not. He who gives away more than he has is a rogue. On the other hand, if a kind heart is the only thing that life and the depression have allowed us to keep, must we abandon this asset also and reckon the value of our hospitality in dollars and cents? How difficult it is to *live*, and how much easier it must be for those who have only an automatic pump under their left breast pocket, and whose feelings lie on ice under their shiny pates.

What business was it of mine that two girls had cycled off into a rainstorm instead of staying at home and helping their mothers to dust the knick-knacks on the sideboard? Girls ought to stay at home with their mothers and not roam the country roads in the rain, disturbing peaceable farmers after nine in the evening.

Another drop of water fell from the tip of that nose.

"Oh, well, off with you to the guest room. Up

the stairs, second door to the right. There is rhubarb pudding on the kitchen table. Good night."

They stayed a few days and were served breakfast and kittens in bed in the morning.

Were they satisfied with my hospitality? I hope so. It has always been youth's privilege to receive without giving anything in return. Likewise, old people are privileged to give without being suspected of having ulterior motives. But we middle-aged, what can we do? Nothing! If we accept a kindness we must reciprocate in some way, and if we do a kindness you may be sure that people will begin to sniff around for a motive.

One quiet evening I was sitting by the millpond among the pink willow herb, watching the fish leap after mosquitoes. There were dense swarms of the insects over the pond, and I noticed that every so often one would fall into the water. I wondered why the others flung themselves on it. I thought immediately of the crows who are said to kill their wounded comrades. Was this true of mosquitoes?

And then my little girl, who was sitting by my side, remarked, " Daddy, do you see how the mosquitoes help the ones who fall into the water? "

Yes, really. That is exactly what was happening. The other mosquitoes flew down and lifted up the fallen one before the fish got it. And think of the danger to which they exposed themselves. Should

a fish come along at that moment it could snap up both the fallen one and the rescuer.

How Kropotkin would have enjoyed my little girl's confirmation of his theory of mutual aid. He would have stroked her brown hair and she would have understood why.

Isn't it noteworthy how our habitual thought is in terms of selfishness and enmity? Habit has blinded our vision so that we do not see what is open to the innocent eyes of an eleven year old child. In any situation, we are there immediately with our mistrust, seeking a bad motive. Why does someone do this or that? Why does he bother himself with utter strangers? Yes, the prevalence of this disagreeable attitude is undeniable, but — drawing no comparisons — why has God taught the mosquitoes that they must risk their lives to save their sisters who fall into the water?

Now the five young storks are standing up in their nest taking turns at flapping their wings. Judging from the progress that one or two of them have made the last few days, they will soon be undertaking their first flight — a matter of as great surprise to themselves as to any of their brothers left behind in the nest. Even now they hop up and hold themselves hovering for a second or two, and that is something for a baby stork who has never done it before. Try it yourself.

The two girls on their bicycles are now on their way down through Jutland, and in six weeks the storks will follow them. The lindens, now full of humming bees, will toss their first brown leaves after the migrating birds who are traveling south. Have we received them graciously this summer, all those who have sought shelter under our roof, so that the storks, seeing it all from their nests, can leave us in the knowledge that they have sojourned with good people?

SUN IN THE STABLE

The fire insurance regulations forbid smoking in barns and stables. All the same I confess that I have spent the better part of the morning in the cow barn smoking my pipe. Most of us have a retreat to which we slip away when we need encouragement or comfort or when we wish merely to be alone, neither speaking nor spoken to. I have such places in the woods, in my garden, and under a wind-blown tree by the lake. But in winter I have still another, my cow barn when in the morning or evening there is no one there. It is particularly pleasant in the morning when it is freshly cleaned and aired and the cows are mumbling the last of their hay. Then one by one they lie down, groaning with satisfaction, and begin the job of digesting the fifty pounds of food which constitutes their

morning meal. It is a job, but apparently they tackle it with pleasure, for their very contours seem to glow with satisfied well-being. I enjoy standing behind them and watching their ruminations become slower and slower until at last, with some maneuvering, they plump down as gently as their fullness permits.

If I had learned from De Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* I should now give you a description of this place of rumination. But unfortunately I am not De Maistre.

Last summer I visited an old schoolmate who is now a farmer, and as we were walking around I asked if we should not go through the stables. "Oh, no," he replied, "I am just now in such a good humor, don't let's go there." I sympathized heartily with him, for I knew what he meant. There was a time when my stable put me too in a bad humor, and you do not know how depressing it is for a farmer to have a place which he must always be avoiding.

Few farmers in these days go about their stables with any particular enthusiasm. And if the stock is poor or on the down grade in numbers or quality, the situation is unendurable unless one is blessed with a native optimism. I have a feeling that hopeful farmers are becoming fewer and fewer. In my younger days I was hopeful, but I notice that this

wonderful gift is slowly leaving me. Still I am grateful for having had it so long.

Without betraying anything that will fail to square with the tax return I must soon file, I don't mind admitting that it has never made me so happy to walk around my cow barn as it does now. That's why I go there when I need encouragement, need to forget the worries which I share with so many others — merchants as well as farmers. An indescribable feeling of well-being is communicated to me from the well kept cows as the morning sun, coming through the freshly washed windows, makes their red name plates look as if they had just been painted. No matter how depressed I am when I enter, this well-being soon takes hold of me, and that is what happened today.

I will not annoy you with my opinion of the times nor with a description of their effect on me. Suffice it to say that I have noticed how gray my hair is getting — and that is partly on account of the times and partly on account of the way people are talking about them.

But thank God for the cows, and thank God for the sun shining on their glossy backs, and for the heifer who turns her head so that I may scratch her neck, and who lows when I leave her. And for the calves who stand and chew at a wisp of hay without ever seeming to get it down. And for the black cat

on the milking stool who arches his back affectionately as I approach. We call him the Imp because he was so wild and frenzied as a kitten. He lost his mother before he was weaned and, crawling out to look for her, he fell down a drain. One of the farm students pulled him up, and though drenched and half dead, and only a tiny thing, he hissed and spat at his rescuer — who was tempted to put him back. He was installed in the cow barn and given fresh milk to drink — but he still hissed and spat. Gradually he thawed out and became friendly, and now he is the friendliest of all the stable cats.

Let's sit on the wheelbarrow, with the Imp on our knee, and stroke his black fur. If we put our ear close to his round head with its fiery yellow eyes, we shall hear a gentle simmering which gradually grows louder. The Imp is purring. And both of us begin to forget — he, his earlier hatred of all living beings except his mother, and I, the whole world outside my stable door.

Kitten, keep on purring for me. We all need, so much, to purr for one another. And just as the two of us don't know whether you purr because I stroke you or I stroke you because you purr, so, without waiting to know if any reward will be given, should we pour out our gifts.

Kitten, why do you tell me that — just now?

THE PHONOGRAPH RECORDS

The students are playing the phonograph in the dining room where they can enjoy it without bothering me, for they know that I don't like it. There is a melancholy Negro piece which is all the vogue just now, and it seems to me that they play it incessantly from the moment they leave the supper table till bedtime.

It is a queer thing, but if you have only ten records one of them will be played constantly until you don't even want to see its shadow. Then you take up another until that is worn out. Love, in short, acts on phonograph records as it does on human beings; and they who never suffer from its wear and tear have no reason to boast about it, for it only shows that they have not been able to awaken love as others have.

And speaking of people, have you noticed how some are always ready to greet with a malicious shrug of the shoulders the failures of those who live dangerously because of a natural inclination to swim through the breakers — because they had the same qualities that cause some phonograph records to be worn out faster than others?

But if you belong to those who live a calm life do not pity them for whom things went badly; many have been amply repaid for their misfortunes by a single glimpse over the mountaintops.

If Hans Christian Andersen were still alive he would have written a story of phonograph records — about the one shiny and almost unused which lay in the box and despised the one that was dull and worn. He would have started the story by telling about all the bright eyes which followed the one as it whirled around and sent forth its tones, while the other was put aside with a " there's nothing to that one."

Hans Christian Andersen has evoked stories from things with much less substance than a phonograph record. But now that story will never be written, for who would have courage to imitate him? During my school days in Aarhus I once tore an exercise book to pieces when an admiring friend said that the composition I had just written recalled Hans Christian Andersen. Then it was clear to me that

it was mere plagiarism, on which I could not stake my reputation. I rewrote the composition, using the prosaic formula the teacher had given us: "Prepare an outline! Note the division of the universe into classifications. For example, if you are writing about a tiger, begin by saying that the tiger is a beast of prey, that he belongs to the mammals. And so, beginning with creation you gradually work nearer to your subject. Finally you come to grips with the tiger." Very interesting and intellectual! But it bears no resemblance to Hans Christian Andersen.

No, the story of the phonograph records will probably never be written, and that is really a pity, for the subject is so rich. What a strange power they have over the mind as they whiz around and the tones stream out of the horn. I am not thinking so much of the modern styles in cabinets where you don't see any of the mechanism. No, I mean those that don't pretend to be other than they are, and which are wound up conscientiously each time by a promising agricultural student, who then, with his nose halfway down the horn, devours every word and every tone the miracle produces.

So we go through the whole repertory, and when that is done we play the favorite record a few times more. Then, to the tones of the sorrowful saxophone, we break up and go to bed — to repeat the whole performance the next evening with the same interest, not to say rapture.

One who has reached my age and station can almost envy, on behalf of the plow, such attachment as that. Think, if it were possible to concentrate the students' interest so intensively and warmly on the wonders which nature daily displays before their eyes! Can the wonders of the phonograph really compare with these? How can people sit evening after evening and stare captivated into a tin horn, from which every evening the same tones come to greet them, while they apparently are quite unaffected by the series of daily wonders which constitute a farmer's life?

The snipe which alights by my foot and disappears between the branches in the wood — does it not bring along a miracle? What has it not seen? And what drives it toward the north in the early spring and back again in autumn?

And our own life, that it should shape itself as it does! Think of yourself as a schoolboy in a short blue jacket — and now! Think back and notice how a thousand apparently accidental circumstances have formed the life that now lies behind us. And what awaits us? No one knows. No one knows whether it is to be good or evil.

Now the phonograph has sung its last elegy for tonight; and the records are asleep in the pasteboard box, the worn ones lying beside the unworn. Just like people.

RED CLOVER AND WHITE CLOVER

Here where the barley and the oats adjoin is a small grass-covered furrow, and anyone lying there is hidden by the high grain. And down between the two dense hedges of dark green oats and light green barley there is a wonderfully sweet and warm fragrance from the small round heads of white clover which dot the green ground.

It is not a particularly busy time now, with the hay from the meadows in the barn and the harvest not yet begun. So we can easily excuse ourselves for lying here, looking up at the driving clouds in the blue heavens and drawing in the sweet scent of the clover while we listen to the wind playing on the thousand bells of the oats.

The bees are humming all around; when they alight on a clover head the humming ceases while

they suck up the nectar — and then they hum their way to the next. Looking into the oats is like looking into a thick forest, along the bottom of which stands the red clover tightly clustered and heavy. Red clover and white clover — two sisters so alike and yet so different. Who knows how the one became red and the other white?

Why, I know that, certainly, whispers the summer breeze between the heavy ears of oats; and if we lie still and listen the breeze will perhaps tell us the whole story. There are not many things the summer breeze does not know — but it does not tell tales to everyone. And we miss, so easily, the ability to understand what it does whisper when our heads are so continually busy working for daily bread and a secure future. I understood it at one time, and it was then that it told me about the red clover and the white. Shall we ask the wind to tell it again while we lie here sheltered by the oats? But we must first follow the race between the two small white clouds which sail over the blue sky. I choose the one that is now behind and wager a bouquet of the Maltese cross which you admired this morning in the garden. What do you wager? You won't say — and now it is too late! He lost, she won.

But now the wind is beginning to whisper. At first an ordinary sighing, but gradually the sigh becomes a soft humming in the small round tops of the

white clover and a quiet song in the heavy clusters of red clover in among the oats. And in lilting summer verses the wind tells of the two sisters who lived so long ago that even he who saw this happen has forgotten the time and the place.

These sisters were so alike in appearance that you could not tell one from the other, but in temperament they were as widely different as only sisters in a fairy tale can be; and if people live a long life together appearance is a minor matter compared with that which controls one's thoughts. And the thoughts of these sisters were always set on flight from home — only away, so that life should not elude them! It is a hard thing to guide the young, especially if you are rich. It is easy enough to bring up your children if you are poor.

But these two had everything they could wish for.

"I wish I were a flower," said one, "a beautiful red flower."

"They have such short lives," said the other.

"Yes, but they live so beautifully. The sun shines on them; and the bees and the butterflies come and drink from their cups. What does it matter that their lives are so short if only they are lovely and filled with sunshine and flickering butterflies?"

"I would rather live a long time in silent peace

with the busy bees," said the other. "And if I were to be a flower I would be little and white, and I would always stay in the same place and teach people faithfulness and humility."

So the two sisters strolled through the fields and dreamed; and behind them came an invisible fairy and read their thoughts, and she touched them lightly with her wand and disappeared. And then, little by little, the two sisters were transformed. One of them grew smaller and smaller, her hair slowly became white, and her dress became green and sewed around with small leaves in clusters of three and three together, and she looked down at herself in wonder. And her sister acquired also a green dress of larger leaves, but above it shone a thick red cluster of small, narrow flowers.

"I'm going to stay here," said the red one, and stopped where she was in the field.

"You live such a short time here," said the white one, and hurried to the edge of the field before she should take root.

And there they stood and nodded to each other the summer through. Big, fat, heavy bees came and sucked nectar from the red one's mouth, and the white butterfly unrolled his proboscis and tried to reach the bottom of the cup. Then, in gratitude, they flew flickering around the clover cluster. But the white clover stood low and modestly at the

edge of the field and gave to the small golden bees. And so have red clover and white clover done ever since. Now you see white clover in the cultivated part of the field as well, but it is nearly always a plant that has been there many years, for the white clover loves a peaceful life spent in the company of the bees.

I can hear someone say that this is a poor fairy tale because it hasn't any moral; there is one in every good fairy tale, and the red sister ought in some way to have been punished for her frivolity! Well, I don't think she was so bad after all. At a students' gathering in Helsingfors a great many years ago a Finnish professor said, "I don't want to live long but I do want to live intensely." And how many of us do not, even if unconsciously, follow that rule?

Oh well, if a moral is such an important matter to you, here you are:

The red clover is much bigger and more beautiful than the white clover, but its calyx is so long that only the insect with a very long proboscis can reach into it. The bumblebee is best at it and indeed almost the only insect who can manage it; and when it ducks down into flower after flower it carries the pollen from one to another and so insures fertilization. But the difficulty of reaching the nectar often tempts the bumblebees to bore a little

hole in the bottom of the cup and suck the nectar through that. So Miss Redclover loses her sweetness, and stands thereafter empty and barren. Nor does it help when she calls through her display of color. Nobody looks in her direction, while her white sister without interruption remains popular with the bees.

Well, is your virtuous vindictiveness satisfied? All right, let's go home to the perennial bed and pick that bouquet of Maltese cross.

MEMORIES

Even after the hottest days the nights are cool. If you stand on the front steps, where the hanging lamp shines through the vines and the moths swarm about the light, a cool sweet fragrance from the blossoming lindens drifts toward you.

After a stiflingly hot day you can hardly drink your fill of the cool night air, and even when the last guests have left it is hard to tear yourself away from the freshness outside. "We went with the last guests to the gate; the nightwind caught the final farewells" — these were Ibsen's farewell thoughts to his guests.

Here too, after a family gathering, we had bid good-bye to the last guests; on the steps our hands had rested in theirs, while we, who never seem to grow up, had tears in our eyes. The last car drove

away and a white hand waved from a rear window; then that too disappeared beyond the lilacs.

Left behind were only the night air and the fragrance of the lindens, the moon over the lake, the moths fluttering near the light, and now and then the sound of a beetle buzzing by or a bat on its flight through the trees. Yes, and the rush of memories awakened by the reunion. . . . "I am not given to new friends," wrote Temple Thurston in a poem about books. "The voices I know are the ones I cherish."

What but memories can draw a person you seldom see so strangely close when you do meet? Memories are the chains that bind us together like galley slaves. Our lives, our thoughts and interests, and our daily acts may be miles apart, but the chains of memory hold us together for life — nor can we ever break them. Peer Gynt thought he could escape his memories by going around them, but they lay there, only awaiting their moment to tighten their hold upon him.

I too felt the tightening of the chains this evening, and the more they tightened the stranger seemed all my experiences in the many years since a small boy sat up in a cherry tree on a summer morning, throwing down pale, dewy cherries to a little cousin in a red dress.

Was she not standing there with her little bare

brown legs in the wet grass, holding out her dress to catch the fruit? And her tiny upturned nose — didn't it point right up in the air as she looked at me, her curls framing her diminutive worldly wise face, while two pigtails with red bows shook with every movement of her head? That motherly warning in her voice when she forbade my climbing out on the furthermost branches to pick a bunch of the reddest cherries!

And to think that it was she who sat at my side this evening, now mistress of a Swedish manor and mother of the little girl with the blonde braids at the far end of the table! And while the chatter of the rest went round the table I listened to her subdued voice at my side. How it brought back to me our whispers when we had fled to a " cave " in the hayloft with an armful of unripened apples! Still as mice we had to sit, hardly daring to breathe, while we heard them talking in the barn below.

" The voices I know are the ones I cherish."

And the voice of my cousin, the lawyer, farther down the table — was it not the same as in memory? Had it not always, even as a schoolboy's, been distinct and logical, like a procedure in court? And now, as he tried from across the table to explain some detail of the registration act, didn't it sound exactly as it did when he instructed us coun-

try lads how to harden the edges of our wooden swords?

How blessed it was to sit there with all the familiar voices circling the table, without being obliged to watch for unknown qualities, to be on guard not to betray one's own unknown weaknesses to others! The more turbulent your thoughts, the safer you feel among familiar voices and all the memories they recall. You are led back years, far away from today's anxieties. Your worries vanish as do those of a lad on vacation. Your joys become clear and vivid in memory's reflection.

The rooms were still lighted when I went inside after whistling for the dogs and closing the outer door. The women of the house were clearing up, carrying out dishes, emptying ash trays, and pulling down shades against the morning sun which would be up in a few hours.

The doors leading to the garden were still wide open, and through them you could see the moonlit lake and the dark woods beyond. I sighed, I believe, as I pulled the doors to, shutting out the moon and the cool night air.

Is there any harm, on such a night, in lying in bed dreaming of a little barelegged girl in a red dress?

TWILIGHT

On my desk stands a little dachshund of red porcelain, a Christmas gift from the cook. As the dog's tail is flat and pointed like a mermaid's, it must be intended for a letter opener, and so I use it. However, I can't help feeling brutal when I pick up the long red dog around its stomach and shove it backwards into an envelope. Its ears are so long they almost reach the ground — that is, they used to be; now it has lost both ears, and that gives its face a still more melancholy expression than it had to begin with.

I was away a couple of days last week and on my return found all well on the farm with one exception: the dog's ears had been brutally cropped. The children were questioned — Who knocked the ears off the red dog? None of them; but it was

evident they knew who had done it! Since they were old enough to understand I have impressed upon them that they must never tell the farm hands or the students what we talk about among ourselves, nor must they carry tales to us of what is done and said out there. Naturally, this does not hold good in case of any serious damage or misdemeanor. But to break the ears off a red dog cannot be considered a serious offense, even if the crime is committed in my private office.

The housemaid? No, she had merely dusted him off but not hurt him in any way.

No doubt you think I am making too much ado over a china dog that cost, perhaps, around a quarter. But the question was — Who had any business in my office? And what was the occasion? So I followed the case.

One of the young girl students confessed to being the culprit, and she further informed me that she and the foreman had been in my office looking for cartridges! I then got the whole story. The two young people spoke at the same time, seemingly enjoying themselves immensely, and apparently they quite forgot that they were being questioned regarding the accusation of mistreating a red dog.

The first day I was away they had noticed two suspicious looking characters sneaking in a furtive

manner about the millpond at noon. When the foreman approached them to ask about the weather, and eventually other subjects, they left without any response.

In the afternoon they were again there, standing behind some bushes, looking at the millpond. I admit that I have often stood there enjoying the sight and have thought of Allingham's poem, "Four Ducks on a Pond" . . . but these two gloomy fellows did not appear to have a taste for landscape beauty. But since there are now about two thousand pounds of trout in the pond, of which the smallest weighs more than a pound, it is easily conceivable that they were more interested in the trout than in the beauty of the landscape.

When they saw that they were discovered they disappeared again, but their behavior strongly indicated that they intended to return at an hour when the chances of being disturbed were not so great.

Toward evening, when the children were in the living room enjoying my absence, one of the students came in to tell them that he had heard from the millpond two splashes which sounded like a net being cast out. The house was at once in an uproar. The foreman, who had just returned from a year's stay in Canada, immediately armed an expedition to capture the criminals — dead or alive. All

available weapons were distributed — among them a bootjack in the shape of a double-barreled cavalry pistol. It might serve as a threat and, being of iron, could also be used as a missile. Cartridges for the two rifles were found in my office — and in the excitement the dog's ears were broken.

Half the force was sent to hold itself in reserve behind the barn, while the foreman with a wild west revolver and accompanied by two students in dark clothes and with loaded guns, slunk along the embankment intending to bob up suddenly and cry, "Hands up!"

It must have been impressive to watch this army slowly wind its way along to the point where the foreman gave the signal and he and his two guerrillas dashed from behind the embankment with fingers on the triggers, while the reserve stood in the background with the bootjack. *Noch ist Polen nicht verloren* — "Poland is not yet lost!"

The girls who took part in this daring expedition have since asserted that their hearts positively stood still, and as the hearts in question are most restless ones, my readers may judge the seriousness of the situation.

Aside from the water, which chanted the continual dripping song of all water mills, and a dog barking behind the hills, all was still when the signal was given.

Out in the pond swam the two who had splashed; but frightened by the sound of the three hunters, they let out a " quack-quack," flapped their wings as they rose and flew away toward the dark evening sky.

I bid you good night.

TRUE VALUES

From my farthest field a point of land runs out into the lake, and at its tip stand two weather-beaten trees. They were alders once, but now they are just a pair of crooked wind-blown trunks with a few withered leaves. The cows rub their horns against them when, in summer, they are pastured there; and if it storms or rains a couple of them will get behind the trees as if they were taking shelter, although the trees have no shelter to give and their few leaves are no screen against rain.

When I go over the fields by the lake I usually stop by these two trees. And when the wind agitates their ruined branches they have always something to tell me which has timely value for a farmer just now. Lately it has been one definite message — ever since the time, indeed, several years ago,

when I thought of them as I was crossing on the North sea. I was coming home from England and had met on the boat an old married couple who had been in America for forty years and were coming to spend their last days in Denmark. What worn-out old people they were! He was tall and had surely once been a giant, but now he was bent and bowed. His long arms hung down so listlessly and aimlessly, and his hands were wrinkled and rough and the fingers were deformed by drudgery. And in his face you could read all you could want to know about lost illusions, hope which never reached fulfillment, disappointment following upon disappointment, and faith which was misplaced so often that at last there was no faith left.

His wife was small, but looked as if she had once cut more of a figure, as if indeed she had once been a well set up girl when, perhaps forty years earlier, she had faced the ocean voyage full of hope and trust for the future. Now she was worn and had a strangely tired look.

Neither of them talked much, but they did tell me a little about their life on the other side. And while they stood before me, with the swelling sea as a background, there came to my mind the two withered trees by the lake. And I remembered Hutchinson's aphorism in *This Freedom*: "One always *was* happy; one so seldom *is*."

The old couple had brought but a little money home with them, doubtless enough for their needs; but apart from that they had lost everything. Their fatherland was a strange country to them. Even its language they spoke haltingly. They had neither children, relatives nor friends. And all their dreams and illusions were gone. As they stood there leaning against the rail they appeared absolutely impoverished. For just as the withered leaves on the two dead trees became fewer and fewer each year, so in all likelihood would their satisfactions become fewer every year and their lives emptier and emptier.

Happy — that is what one was.

How difficult it must be for people who have built their whole lives on material foundations in these present years when such values crumble away. No such values are perpetual; what we confidently counted on yesterday we doubt today.

In my report book of grammar school days there stood — well, there stood plenty that I won't mention for fear of weakening my children's respect for their father — but on the title page was a motto, *Nil non mortale tenemus, pectoris exceptis ingeniique bonis* — "Nothing is immortal except the things of the soul and mind." We have lived through a golden season of "prosperity" during which we have forgotten that wisdom. We have

staged parties and drunk toasts to expanding businesses and self-laudatory banking firms. But Father Time has rudely broken in the door, in the middle of the party, and a cold breath has gone through the banqueting-room: "American statistics: Only twenty-five banks closed during month. Another fall in sterling!" Nothing is immortal.

In our Roman history it was told how Scipio the Younger, looking from a height on the burning of Carthage, became — in spite of the victory and honor which awaited him in Rome — despondent; and how he broke forth with the Homeric quotation: "The day will come when holy Troy shall fall. Priam's city shall fall. And he, the javelin-wielding king, shall fall." It was of Rome that Scipio thought, the victorious triumphant Rome in its proudest moment; for its archfoe Carthage was laid waste and conquered.

Are our own small Scipios, I wonder, as far-sighted when we hold loquacious banquets and our offices are filled with jubilee bouquets? Would that kind of thought be too sad for the occasion? And if so, why? In the very time that material values are crumbling in our hands there is happiness in the recognition that, whatever happens, the good things of the soul and mind and spirit are immortal.

And besides that, they are the least expensive! How many slices of sandwich meat do you get for a

quarter? But save as little as that and you can go to any bookstore and get a treasure which moth and rust cannot corrupt, which no pawnbroker's clerk can enter in his books, and which no licensed fellow citizen can put up at public auction. They can take your furniture, and at that they are only anticipating the moths; they can take the phonograph, which was sooner or later doomed to fall to pieces — they can take everything. All indeed but the one thing, the immortal, whose value will never decline.

Isn't it reasonable, then, to believe that the values of the mind in this evil time will be at a premium?

So toward evening I take a turn along the lake and fetch up beside the two trees on the point. It is as if I had to have a little encouragement; it is beside those two poor withered trees that I get it. And, by the way, do you always pay your taxes when they are due?

LADYBUGS

We have been bringing in the grain the last few days, and everyone on the farm has had to help. Even the children have loaded their small wagon drawn by the Shetland pony. I have been helping in the barn where usually old Niels holds absolute sway. He and I are great friends even if we do not always see eye to eye on modern farming methods. Once when I had won a point he confided to the pupils afterward that I was a "theological" farmer while he was a practical one, adding that that, of course, was my affair.

When it comes to stacking grain in the barn he is at once a "theological" and a practical master, and despite his age he moves like a seventeen year old as he lays the sheaves side by side. I have to use the fork briskly to keep up with him. In the

pauses between loads we sit down on the sheaves to catch our breath. Niels philosophically chews a straw as he wipes the perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand. I lie on my back and watch a sunbeam which comes through a crack in the tile roof. And my thoughts swarm and follow the beam until they reach the crack and slip out. Then nothing can hold them any longer.

They sail over land and sea to the little town of Deventer in Holland and they reach it just as the sun goes down. Along the low canals there is a wealth of variegated flowers, and young girls in light frocks and starched petticoats walk in small groups. It is so quiet among the old houses that you can hear their subdued prattle and nothing else. Oh, the stillness and the fragrance of the flowers, and the silent canals and the cathedral which try to hold the sun's last rays, and the sunset itself over the flat landscape to the west! We are on our way to Amsterdam, but something within us cries, "Stop the train and sell the locomotive and the coaches for old iron. Let us stay here and pray heaven that this mood, this stillness, may last forever." But within the hour we are being tugged and bullied by a small army of redcaps and hotel porters in Amsterdam.

Will we ever again visit Deventer and see the sun go down in flaming gold, lavishing its light on

flowers and canals and young girls in picturesque costumes? There is not much prospect of it, and a farmer, I suppose, is better off if he does not think too much about sunsets in Holland. But just the same it was a sad moment when the train pulled away from it all.

Then came the ladybug, and in a flash my thoughts were home again, wedging themselves through the crack in the roof, and resuming their routine of taxes, interest and bills. A little red ladybug, with seven black spots, creeping on one's hand with its six small black legs was enough to call one all the way back from that town in gingerbread land with its flower-banked canals.

It is not easy for a ladybug to walk on the back of a hand. I am not thinking, of course, of the soft smooth hand of the woman we liked to dream of when we were young and romantic. I mean a regular sunburned man's hand whose short hairs constitute a forest which impedes its progress. And a ladybug likes to travel quickly. Many a harvester could learn harvest tempo from this little creature. Who has ever seen a ladybug saunter up a straw? And why is it in such a hurry? It cannot be looking for plant lice when it runs up and down oat straws.

There are many other crawling things in the harvest grain. Why is this little bug named after the

Virgin Mary, and why do we nominate her to fly up to God bearing our prayers for good weather? And we are not the only devotees of the ladybug. In England they call her the ladybird, a name expressive of both respect and love. I wonder if it is because she comes to us at an auspicious time — the harvest. But is harvest an auspicious time? There is not much cause for rejoicing at harvest time for those who have been obliged to mortgage the year's crops in spring in order to buy their seed and fertilizer, and who now, therefore, are compelled to thresh head over heels just to pay off the debt. Precious few sunbeams find their way to them, even if their roofs are not lacking in cracks.

But a sunbeam does find its way here occasionally. The one I have just told you about paused at a sheaf in my barn and shone on both ladybug and earwig — exactly as that big brother ought to shine, on the just and the unjust, without narrow-minded prejudice. Nature is not moral — fortunately. Suppose she went around and busied herself by punishing us when we deserved it, and handing us gifts only when we had happened to do some good or make happy some fellow mortal? How many of us then would have dry weather for harvest?

Ladybugs! I feel that I must detain you until

I have told you about one ladybug in particular who died many years ago.

At the time, I was one of two students on a farm. The other student was secretly engaged to the daughter of the house. That will sound like Greek to the young people of today, so I must explain it. It meant that in those days parents were consulted before engagements were made, and that young people possessed things called emotions which they took delight in concealing from profane eyes. Now, of course, all that is as extinct as the corset and the miniature of the beloved.

My fellow student was quite unworthy of the girl, but naturally she didn't know it. Girls always judge young men by their appearance, their manners, their *savoir faire*. That is why the awkward man is so handicapped. I could tell you a lot about that.

But one evening my fellow student had packed up and left. And the next day — it was harvest time — the girl had red eyes when she brought me my coffee out in the field. Then she told me — in confidence — what had happened. And now I am going to abuse the confidence.

She had brought this fellow's coffee to him the day before, and they had sat behind an oat stack playing with a straw on which a ladybug ran back and forth between them. It occurred to her that

it might fly straight up to God with her prayers for all that young lovers of seventeen dreamed of in those days.

She held the straw upright, and the ladybug crawled to the top. Then it poised and flew — right on to his neck where, with an oath, he crushed it.

You may call her hysterical — it's an easy word to use, seeing that we don't really know what it means. She wasn't hysterical, but she did grow pale, rise, and go away. She could not bear to see him any more, because she always seemed to see the dead ladybug on his neck.

It was only a little red beetle with seven black spots, but, after all, it was her messenger to God. Thus it became the fate of two people.

That is not so much to tell, so I wonder if after all I have committed a great sin in telling it.

THE HARVEST

Today the last field was harvested. "Shall I put up the horses?" asked the driver prosaically when he came up with the machine. Now, isn't that a question utterly lacking in poetry or feeling? It sounded just as neutral as if he were saying that he was through with this or that field — any other but the last.

It made me think of my childhood when harvesting the last field was one of the year's events and was always signalized by the performance of an unvarying ceremony. When the workers came home from the field where the last stalks had been cut, they lined up before the front steps. Every lad had his scythe on his shoulder, and every girl her rake. Beside the foreman in a row stood twelve or fourteen boys, each with his binding partner

by his side, and when all had spread themselves out in rank the lads set their scythes on the ground and began to make music by hitting them with their whetstones. And the girls similarly made as much noise as they could with their rakes.

Then father would come out on the front steps and ask what this noise meant. And the foreman would answer they had got the harvest in. "Well, is that so," father would say; "but why do you have to make all that noise about it?" To which the foreman would reply: "We've got to have 'a red dram.'" "Nonsense — you must be crazy," father would reply. "Hang up your scythes in the tool room."

"If we don't get a red dram," shouted the foreman, now thoroughly roused, "we'll take the scythes down in the garden and cut the cabbages." And they again began to sharpen them up.

"Now, don't do that," implored father. "Maybe I can get hold of a red dram for you; I'd rather do it than risk that."

Then he would turn and open the big door, and mother would come out with a tray of glasses and decanters that had been standing ready since noon. Every one of them got a red dram, clinked glasses with father and mother, and took the rest of the day off. And then in the evening they had a feast of hot apple fritters.

Later, when the grain was carted home, came the harvest festival, but as I look back it seems to have made nothing like the impression on my mind that was made by this annual play before the front steps.

Today we have finished reaping; and this fellow comes with his "Shall I put up the horses?" Bah! Today nobody comes up and makes a noise with his scythe, and nobody demands a red dram in front of the steps. And nobody threatens me to cut down the cabbages and ends the day by eating apple fritters. And I am spared the trouble of playing out on my doorstep the comedy that my father took part in every year. And with that the party is over. No sentimental demonstrations and no old-time ritual. All that is long ago forgotten in favor of trade union dues and legal regulations regarding employment.

And what good would it do if we did hold fast to the old customs? It was in the first place because people changed that they were given up, little by little; because the roles in such scenes no longer suited us in our materialistic adjustments. To construct for ourselves a pleasing and compelling picture out of a scene like that, we would have to have minds attuned to its humors, filled with thankfulness toward Providence and modest enough to express it. But today our minds have all been

squeezed flat by the hissing steam roller of economics.

Functionalism, which is now the rage in architecture and in home interiors, has for a long time been making its soundless inroads into our souls and has driven therefrom all romantic and sentimental cant and affectation and other forms of life's useless nonsense. But with some of us the old reminiscences pop up at times, as they did for me when this fellow came back from harvesting the last field. The desire I felt to express my joy by inviting him to some festivity or other was just an inheritance from the little boy who stood and watched his father and mother pour drinks for the harvest hands before the main steps. The pleasure which shone from father's face and the pride and satisfaction of the harvesters gave the scene an unforgettable quality — something which no good intention can revive in our present day. Would not our reason be on the alert to strip the tinsel from the event? Why should I give a party for these people? Wouldn't they, anyway, rather have the equivalent in cash? And can you blame them? reason would ask.

The personal relationship which existed in the old days between the harvesters and their scythes and the ripe grain has been broken by the noise of

the self-binder. "See, now drops the grain down o'er the reaper's arm as a woman slowly sinks against her lover's breast." Doubtless very few harvesters see that — not having Aakjaer's imagination; but in the harvesting as it used to be there was nevertheless an inspiration which was healthy and which made for the preservation of worth-while traditions. Now, the self-binder and the trade unions have given it a mortal wound. We can re-enact the dead forms — but they will never amount to more than marionette shows. For that which should infuse life into them must come from us, and it is something which we have long since lost.

It is, in a word, humility which was once mediated to men through their collaboration with nature, but of which our victory over nature has robbed us, so that we now look at everything with a cold, fishy stare.

Yes, just put up the horses.

METEOROLOGY

Now the hay is stacked in the fields, and interest in the barometer is beginning to climb. Although I am a Jutlander and a farmer, meteorology is to me such a little cultivated field that if you begin a conversation by bringing in the weather it is a very doubtful business. I have my suspicions about this weather but I prefer to keep them to myself, and I nurse a positive admiration for those people who can read the weather's future in a present which, as far as I can see, has nothing to tell.

Every year at harvest time I promise myself that never again will I have guests during an event so dependent on the weather. But the following summer, at haystacking time, I find myself surrounded by a group of concerned guests who are more than willing to pay for their country entertainment by placing their meteorological lore at my disposal.

Some people think that through the radio weather predictions we are given all the misleading information that a hypochondriacal farmer could wish in these difficult days of hay harvesting, but as I have no radio I have nothing to say on that score, but must be content to take advantage of the fact that on every well ordered farm there is always at least one person — and usually several — ready at all times, and without special invitation, to place his knowledge of this mystery at the owner's disposal. You need never therefore feel yourself lost when you are confronted with important decisions over haymaking.

Last week I had twenty loads of clover hay lying on the field, and the constant alternation between rain and sunshine lured the weather prophets out like young toads on the edge of a ditch. I am phlegmatic, and a good book can quickly carry me into another world than this one where wet haystacks steam in the noonday sun. I had four guests, of whom two were men who fought to share my anxieties and were quite tireless in their eagerness to give me the benefit of their little observations of the clouds and the hair-fine movements of the barometer.

Friday was particularly bad. One of the men had looked out of the guest room window at three o'clock in the morning and seen a fog over the lake, which undoubtedly means rain during the day.

At nine o'clock I met the other one on the front steps from which he gazed southward at a small black cloud edged with white. I was in excellent humor that morning; I had received a letter from a woman, unknown to me, but evidently sympathetic, who reproached me for something I had written. For a modest man, the fact that somebody will take the trouble even to reproach him is a great experience.

I interrupted my guest's scrutiny of the cloud with the same outburst which was used by the pope, in a tragic time, as a weapon from the Bible with which to strike at Galileo's stargazing:

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into Heaven?"

"Good morning! Have you ever seen a more typical example of a cloud indicating a change of weather? I should like to photograph that cloud; it is characteristic."

I am still at the primitive stage of culture where one considers that a cloud is a cloud and that films cost money. Of course I too take pictures, but it would never occur to me to sacrifice a film on a cloud. On the other hand, I photograph my children on Sundays and my wife when she has a new hat.

Well, the cloud was photographed, of course. There still are people in whom the depression has not sown the seed of economy, and this prophecy

of change was a sufficient excuse. For some days before, it had only begun to rain in the afternoons when we had the stacks dumped and spread, but that day it began raining at ten thirty in the morning, a fact which the prophet noted with due pride.

At noon it cleared up and the barometer rose a millimeter. I didn't know whether I should express my joy by embracing my wife or a friend of hers who was visiting us — when it is a matter of showing one's gratitude to Providence no sacrifice is too great — but then came an older woman guest and told me that the summer sausage was wet. I hate summer sausage, and whether it was wet or dry mattered not an iota to me, but then she added that the moisture on the sausage indicated rain within three hours, and advised me to bring the hay in even if it were not quite dry. Otherwise it would be much wetter before evening. If necessary it could be dried on racks in the barn.

I did not bring in the hay but shut myself up in my office and read Rousseau's *Confessions*. At three o'clock it rained again and at four thirty the sun shone. One of the guests talked with me about the flight of the swallows, and wondered if it meant rain when they flew low. Shortly after the other guest came to tell me that the black wood snails had sand on their tails, a fact which everyone

knew signified rain before night. Like a polite host I feigned deep interest in the ornamented snails and none in Rousseau.

In the evening my wife's friend suggested that we take a walk in the garden. A garden after rain has always had a very warming influence on my disposition, and now as I walked down the shrub-lined path with a pretty girl by my side I actually felt twenty years younger, and I began to recall some of the blessed dreams of my youth.

"We will surely have rain tomorrow, for the mosquitoes are biting terribly!" said a voice at my side. Now I have always felt that mosquito bites are not an aesthetic subject for conversation, and I made an imperceptible grimace and immediately regained twenty years.

We sat on the bench by the lake and looked at the moon rising slowly above the woods on the opposite shore. Gradually my spirits returned and I began to tell a story which has always made an impression on young girls when I told it beside a moon-reflecting lake.

I never know how my stories affect young girls when I tell them, but they grip me so completely that often I find myself in tears. Whether that was the case on this particular Friday I can't remember, but suddenly the young girl interrupted me:

"We will have rain tomorrow, there is a ring around the moon."

That was enough. I was again the middle-aged farmer who had twenty loads of hay out in the rain and, coldly, I suggested that we go in.

"We'll get rain again tomorrow so help me," remarked the stable foreman in passing, "the way the fish are jumping in the millpond."

I went to bed — with Rousseau and his candid confessions.

SEPTEMBER

"*I envy* you your autumn in the country," a friend recently wrote me; and I am quite conscious of all that he envies. But there are things outsiders do not see, and they can rob us of some of our pleasure in the leaves' display of color, the heavy red clusters of mountain ash berries and the clean, bright September air. One of these things grieved me today — the cow fodder. Indeed, in their own way the cows tell me that autumn is here. The grass gets poorer and therefore the milk is off grade. We try to raise it again with prepared fodder, but every Saturday when I go over the control sheets I can see that we have not been successful.

Then one needs encouragement in some other way, and usually it comes if one is in a receptive mood.

Today I had all the sheets for the last two months spread out before me, and I must confess that I wished dreadfully for October when the first autumn calves are due. But all of a sudden in comes my little boy from school. He rushes up, puts his arms around my neck, and rubs his little pug nose against my cheek. Something must be in the wind — and there is!

"Daddy, can't I . . . daddy, do you know what? George will sell his canoe for seventy-five cents. May I buy it? I have thirty-five cents of my own that I got for two pigeons I sold yesterday. Won't you let me have the rest until I sell the next young pigeons? Won't you? "

A canoe — a whole ship for seventy-five cents! A ship which can carry a little boy from the shore of adventure, make him a captain, a shipowner who chooses his own course and decides where he will land. All that for seventy-five cents!

He thinks that it is only a few thin boards and strips which George has put together so that they can float on the water and carry him along. Little does he suspect that in reality it is a magic carpet, which not only carries him off across the water but transforms him into everything he wishes. And the water — water more than anything else has the power to evoke dreams. Man is created to walk on the earth, but have you ever seen a pool of water

near a human dwelling and not somewhere along its bank a white painted boat?

Water, whether it be sea or lake, river or stream, is, when the sun shines on it, like the landscape's winking eye. It draws our gaze, it evokes our longings and awakens our dreams as nothing else does. A tempestuous sea can fill us with fear, but it does attract us nevertheless in some odd way; and if a wave casts a tarred stick up at our feet, it is as if the fairy of adventure had touched us with her magic wand; and if we pick up the stick we give ourselves over to the power of enchantment, and it begins to talk to us. At first it is in a soft whisper, almost inaudible against the noise of the waves. But if we stand still on the shore and listen, the whisper and the noise of the waves blend in a song of far lands, of ships with swelling sails, of dark stormy nights under the Southern Cross, of sunlit shores with palms which glitter in the sun, of brown men with smooth, shining bodies diving for pearls. . . .

And if you have ever tried sailing alone on moonlit nights in a little boat, then just the smell of the sea, just the sight of the glittering water beside Jutland's heaths, will fill your ear with the seething and frothing in the boat's lee and the creaking of the mast when a gust of wind lays her over; and you see the spurt from the lashing of shrouds when

they cut through the foaming water. You see the phosphorescence that lies like a Milky Way behind you, twisting itself with every turn of your rudder.

On a pinnacle of a rock island in the southern Norwegian skerries I saw once, as I sailed past, an inscription painted in large, white, awkwardly made letters: "Blessed are they who go out upon the sea." At the time, I took it to be a text from the Bible — I suppose I was thinking of the Sermon on the Mount — but it may well have been just the expression of a religious fisherfolk's hopes and dreams. But the sea, or any water for that matter, justifies many naïve dreams, much romance and many volumes of expansive lyrics.

And now a little boy stood with his arm about my neck, ravished with the idea of "going out upon the sea" in a canoe costing seventy-five cents. He carried my thoughts to another boy, now past middle age and gray, who once had nothing better than a leaky horse trough to sail in; so leaky indeed that with a sack for a sail, in good wind, he could just get across the pond before it sank. An exciting voyage it was, for it was not a matter of the fifty yards from shore to shore, but a venturesome expedition with contraband from Vladivostok to the besieged Port Arthur. And if it fell out that the ship sank before it reached land, it was not so much because the holes in the rotten boards were too big,

but because Admiral Togo's swift cruisers had sunk it, or the sea was full of drifting mines. Just think — if only I had had a canoe then! But then again the expedition for the relief of the brave General Stoessel would not have been nearly so exciting.

George got the seventy-five cents, and now the canoe lies among the rushes in the millpond and awaits secret orders — when the captain is through doing his lessons. . . .

And the cows are pasturing in the shelter of the woods, in the stubble with the new clover. The sun shines through the veranda door, and Strit comes to take me for a walk through the fields. And the milk control sheets I have long since forgotten.

WITHERED LEAVES

Anyone who doubts that fall is here ought to have been standing with me this morning on the front steps. The Virginia creeper, while for the most part still green, was here and there stained a deep red. It was calm and the sky was blue. The air was crisp and typical of September, and all you could hear was the fall of the lindens' withered leaves through the still dense treetops. There was a continuous rattling as they fell from branch to branch before they passed the lowest and then silently fell to the earth. They lay there mixed with their fellows and with the winged linden fruit which the night chill and the autumn winds had already detached. They lie in a heap, and every evening Niels rakes them together and carries them off in his old dilapidated wheelbarrow.

And gradually the trees thin out, especially in their tops. Every day more sky can be seen between them and by and by, through the lower branches, I can see the brick and timber of the stables.

Harvest is over and the barns are full. Niels says that our rye alone measures as much as our total grain last year. And Niels knows what he is talking about, for it is there his interest is directed and nowhere else. What a fortunate man he is. His thoughts are only of the day and its tasks. He rejoices over things which we would call trifling; and his primitive attitude toward the changes of the seasons — which for him are inseparably tied up with the thought of the job appropriate to each — fills me with wonder, if not indeed with envy.

" Teach me, O woods, to wither gladly " — says an old Danish hymn. That art Niels does not have to learn. He knows it, and the unrest which the shifting seasons cause in us is with him only a quiet preoccupation with preparations for what is coming next. I feel always as if I were a neglectful and indifferent farmer when I see his forearmed peacefulness at times when I am inwardly boiling with anxiety, joy or longing. Although every year since I have been farming I have got my grain safely housed — even if I have been late now and then — I still feel nervous at the approach of harvest. That is

of course because I am poorly prepared for what awaits me — in every way in which one can be poorly prepared. And this anxiety robs me of some of my gladness over the spring and over luxuriant summer.

Indeed I enjoy much more the autumn and the winter. A day like this with full sun, a blue sky and a fresh west wind, and with harvest behind me, I would not exchange for a glimpse of the budding leaves in the wood, for the wood pigeons' nuptial songs or the tufts of light green spears that peep from behind the withered grass by the edges of every ditch. Nor would I exchange it for the golden grain fields of July or August, for the garden's heavy perfume of phlox or for the humming of the bees in the linden.

It isn't because such a day gives my mind a rest after the work of summer and autumn. No, there is only peace after quite definite worries, but then it seems as if a wild longing came storming to take their place.

Some people feel this sort of longing in the spring when they think of the chestnuts flowering on the Paris boulevards; others long for the mountains when Sirius divides the sky with the sun and we here in the lowlands have to turn our haystacks so that the sun gets a chance between showers to steam them out. Perhaps it is because I must manage

my farm and so have no time for wanderlust that I don't give such things a thought, but imagine that the chestnuts bloom just as beautifully at Whitsuntide along the lakes in Copenhagen, and that our own mountains are enough to gratify my eyes and tire my legs.

But nevertheless in September that wanderlust breaks out. Not because I am unaware that our autumn is beautiful, but because its very beauty puts me into a susceptible mood in which memories arise of all the places I have ever been fond of. And so I always look for an excuse to light out. It is not easy for a farmer nowadays to persuade himself — to say nothing of his wife — that a foreign land is demanding his presence. But it has been done before, to my joy, and if part of my conscience did not wish to assent — well, I just let it stay at home.

I wonder if the sun is setting now behind the church tower in Deventer and shining on the flowers, the canals and the young girls? And if my particular friend with the flowered dress is again standing on the bridge in front of her mother's house in Haarlem, with her rather abashed smile when the slightly bewildered foreigners talk to her in bad German. "*Auf Wiedersehen*," she used to say as she raised her well rounded arm. A little too rounded, perhaps, for any other setting than just that bridge in Haarlem? Well, she is undoubtedly

married by this time, and other young girls stand on the bridge and smile at the passers-by — and at those who stop.

The blue autumn crocus will soon be blooming in St. James' park in London and no sentimental Dane who has just spent an evening weeping in the theater will be going the next morning to the park to pick one to give the lady who told him to be sure to see *Autumn Crocus*.

Now Niels is out on the grounds raking up the leaves, and here sit I and rustle among my withered ones. Lucky Niels.

LONGHORN

Longhorn gave birth to a calf last night, and as she is one of the children's pets the event was anticipated with lively interest. The question uppermost in the children's minds for days past had been: Will it be a boy or a girl? The family trees on both sides were studied for some hint of a family tendency to produce males or females. I encouraged my little girl in the anticipation of a heifer. For if it is a bull calf it will in all probability be slaughtered, and that would be a heartbreak from which the children would be a long time recovering.

My little girl announced triumphantly, however, a day or so ago, that there was no longer any doubt — old Niels himself had said that it would be a heifer. The mother lay always on her left side (or was it the right side?) and that, as is well known,

portends a heifer calf. That ought to settle it. But my older boy, Ole, who amuses himself at times by teasing his sister — a tempting game because she always falls for it — has now begun to predict that it will be a bull calf. Naturally she has spurned the thought, but its seed sprouts nevertheless, for last night, as she sat on my knee after reciting her English lesson, she returned to the subject of the calf and asked me if Longhorn were not a good cow.

"She certainly is."

"And wasn't her mother a good cow?"

"Decidedly."

"Then, daddy, shouldn't we for once let a bull calf of hers live?"

Ah, you try to catch me! Now I saw what she was up to; and naturally I did not have the heart to close this little path of hope, and I told her that the idea was by no means inadmissible.

At bedtime I had to take her hand in mine and cross the yard for a look at Longhorn. When I entered the barn to light up she cautioned me: "Careful, daddy, that you don't step on the kitty-cats."

Nor was the warning needless, for we were no sooner in than the cats were rubbing against us with their backs arched and their tails in the air.

Longhorn lay — to my little girl's immense relief — on the proper side, chewing the cud. When we

approached she made a move as if to rise, but changed her mind and groaned instead. Apart from that, she made no move further to unveil her secret for the present.

So we petted the black cat until he purred, gave the others enough attention to avoid jealousies, and returned to the house — the daughter to her little white bed and the father to his chair by the fire and a book by Warwick Deeping.

Was it not Angelus Silesius who said, " Man, by that which you love will you be transformed "? I think of that very often as I watch my children's absorption in the wonders of nature which here in the country are ever before their eyes. All the little happenings in which plants and animals are the protagonists and where God's finger, as it were, is felt behind it all. To become good men and women must be easier out here than where one is surrounded by the works of men and where the sky is visible only through fog and smoke.

Do you know Staun's *A Proletarian Boy's Apprenticeship?* To my mind it is comparable with Zola's *Downfall.* When you have children of your own who live happily among flowers and animals in the quiet country it cuts to the heart to read of a boy's miserable childhood in a crowded city tenement. Since childhood I have heard what a fine thing it is to " come of good stock," and I have al-

ways felt that it was a gift, a privilege, worth infinitely more than any economic or political advantage. But I have often asked myself how we who enjoy the respect of our fellow citizens would have turned out if we had grown up in a back yard in a filthy city slum. It is far from a cheering thought, and I can give myself cold shivers by thinking of the struggle there would have been between the terrible influences of the surroundings and the inheritance of "good stock." And when I picture my two boys — to say nothing of my little girl — in such surroundings as are described in Staun's book, I simply have to drive the thought out of my mind.

The times are hard, but, my friends, just to live here in the country, to see your little girl carry a cat over a high snowdrift or call the chickens together around a bowl of warm potatoes, all that is reward enough for every material anxiety. And I think I am justified in saying that behind all the apparent envy to which our farmers are now giving voice, there lies one untamed and burning desire: You may enjoy to your heart's content your state-subsidized paradises, if only we may keep even the ruins of our forefathers' homesteads.

In the days that are coming what will land be worth, or houses, or ships, or factories? Who knows but that — as an old proverb often reminds me — you may hide the cream only to have the cat

find it. But if you can give your children richness of mind and a sense of joy in the companionship of flowers and animals, you have given them a goodly heritage.

My youngest raced into my bedroom this morning, in her pajamas with the blue forget-me-nots, and shouted, "Daddy, Longhorn has a heifer calf and gee, it's so sweet! . . ."

Old Niels was right.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

There are hollows in my woods given over to foxes and badgers. We see their small, firmly tramped paths through the bay willow's dense thickets and over the wood sorrel's light carpet. I followed one of them today which led me to a hill falling off abruptly to the south where five or six fox burrows lay in a row. Out over one of them a dead Norway spruce is leaning. It is not decorative but it makes a convenient resting place after the climb.

The gullies beneath are filled in with young oak and alder, and a single birch rises above them, slender, white and graceful, with its tiny leaves glittering in the sun. The Latin name of birch is *betula* — and doesn't the word also mean " a maiden "? Certainly this birch as it stands there resembles a delicate maiden with just that peach bloom which

seems to be dying out among our young girls and which excites only a smile among our young men. But nature does not change her fashions. As the beech looks now so did it always look — even when Aslög dressed herself to meet Regnar Lodbrog. It is only men and the work of men which is ever changing.

Behind the gullies lie the grazing meadows, and over them sail flocks of crows and starlings. It is the season of migration. The storks had left us by the twelfth of August and the swallows will soon follow them. The crows gather here in great flocks in the fall, coming, I suppose, from the north to winter with us. The meadows are often black with them, and in the dark, stormy nights they perch and sleep in the trees on the other side of the lake. If you walk in the woods at night you may suddenly start them up, and as if by magic the silent wood becomes alive and the air is filled with their cawing and its weird echoes from the trees.

But now in the September sunshine they look for gleanings in the oat stubble and the starlings join them. I have never liked starlings. Their policy regarding cherries and currants does not testify to sound morality; from my boyhood days I have always regarded them as competitors who were given too favorable a handicap. Didn't God give them wings that enabled them to reach the

fruit on the topmost bough of the cherry tree? And didn't he — to my envy — give them stomachs that seemed adequate to unlimited quantities of the fruit? Surely it was in a fit of wrath that he created them. Even if in later years I have learned to look with greater tolerance on the failings of men and of animals, the old animosity toward the starlings stands immovable in my mind. Our childhood enemies often become our enemies for life just because childhood impressions outlive all the feelings which come and go in later life.

A few years ago I wished to buy heifers and went to a farm where some were advertised for sale. The owner turned out to be a man who had worked for my father in my boyhood. When he mentioned his name I immediately had an uncomfortable feeling, and as we went to the pen I racked my brain for the reason. Suddenly I had it:

It was harvest time at home when I was five or six. I liked to ride out to the fields in the empty harvest wagons, enjoy their stiff jolting, watch the ground beetles and the ladybugs which danced about in the loose grain on their floors. Homeward bound, I would lie on top of the load and gaze into the blue sky until it was succeeded by the darkness as we entered the barn door. Then I was thrown down through the air, caught in strong, perspiring arms, and carefully set among the sheaves. And

when the grain was piled high enough I could peep right into the sparrows' tattered nests high above the beams. Yes, that was the life for a boy — and that is the life my boys are leading now.

A picture of such a harvest slowly composed itself in my mind as I walked along talking shop with the owner of the heifers; and I saw a little boy who stood by the barn waiting for an empty wagon . . . and it was this man who drove it. Could I ride with him? Yes, was the answer, but I must go and ask permission first. And he grinned. I didn't like the grin, and I asked if he would surely wait for me. He promised, and I ran as fast as I could, but when I reached the corner of the barn he set out at a trot for the field. For a long time a little boy stood by the wall of the barn and cried. He perhaps thought he was crying because he had not been taken out to the field, but I think he cried really because his faith in grown people's promises had received a serious blow — perhaps its first.

Broken faith is something we must meet sooner or later, but is it not especially difficult to meet in childhood when such impressions sink in the deepest? I would hardly have felt any aversion for this man so many years after if it had been only a ride he had cheated me of. No, a greater breach was involved which neither of us thought of then but which I have often thought of since.

This man would have considered me most vindictive if I had told him that I would not buy his heifers because he had cheated me of that ride — nor did I tell him so, but undoubtedly that was why I did not. And even if I did not think of my action as a revenge for the little boy who stood by the barn and cried, I could not help the fact that that circumstance was the deciding factor in my refusal.

For buy them I didn't; and I often wonder if, in a manner similar to this, bad deeds, after many years in the land of oblivion, do not return unsuspected. The good deeds may, too. And only now and then do we learn that they bring punishment or reward for actions we have long since forgotten. Fate never overlooks them; like the birds of passage they come and go, alone or in a flock.

Now the sun is sinking and a heron glides with slow wing stroke through the air to his nest in the wood. This evening we shall have a fire in the grate, for autumn is here.

RIME ON THE ROOFS

This morning there was rime on the roofs; so if we had not known before that winter was on the way this would have told us. We are just now busy with getting in the beetroots, which cannot stand frost, so that we may get them under cover before it begins to freeze. When the wet and stormy weather ceased last week it became cold, sunny and calm, the very pattern of what we consider beautiful autumn weather. Otherwise we should have prepared ourselves to enjoy for the rest of the month what the Swedes call "coffee weather," "theater weather" and "fortune tellers' weather."

But we are now having star-clear evenings and mornings though a cold fog does cover the ground. When I went over to the farthest field at seven this morning to see the new rye, I stood on a hill and

looked over a still landscape which glittered in the sun. A bluish mist lay over everything, not enough to prevent one from seeing all around but just enough to mark off the woods to the south. The nearest woods lay clear and sharp in the sun and were mirrored in the lake, but behind them the land is low, and then there is another patch of woods to which the mist gave another color. Away in the background there weaves a ridge of wood-grown hills and its contours became less and less definite in the mist until they disappeared on the horizon.

From the level land behind the nearest strip of woods the smoke from the town chimneys rose and mingled with the mist. Only the thick black smoke from the factory chimney climbed straight up into the air, looking like pillars which broadened at the top and poised themselves like black clouds over the town. The ugly streets and houses of the little town were transformed by the mist into a web of romance — and I was caught in it. Before I knew it I was standing, on a Sunday morning, in a churchyard in Leksand, up in Dalecarlia. There too the smoke from all the chimneys in the little town lay still over house and tree. Sleigh bells sounded from the bridge over the brook, and at the same time from the bottom of the hill sounded the oar strokes of a boatload of churchgoers from the other side. Their softened voices sounded

nearer and nearer and soon I followed the little crowd into the church. . . .

It was in 1916 that I first sat there, and it seemed as if the quiet blue mist followed me into the church and lay like incense between the high windows. The stillness and devotion in these strangers' faces, the women's variegated dresses in joyous, clear colors, and the sun which shone through the high windows — all that captivated me more than I had ever before felt myself moved in any Scandinavian church. And when I turned to the sharer of my pew, a little fourteen or fifteen year old girl in a picturesque dress, a little cap and starched petticoats, to ask her a question about the service, she glanced at me, laid a little chubby finger on her lips and held her hymnbook toward me — and at that moment the singing began.

I am sure that the Lord will forgive me that I did not sing too; it was partly because I can't sing and partly because I exercised my devotion by watching the little serious countenance of the girl by my side. There was no good quality that I could not see in it, and there was no evil which could thrive in its neighborhood; nor was there any depth of devotion that it could not awaken. She was as serious as a little woman — yes, she resembled a little woman both in her dress and in her seriousness, and although I was years older than she I felt

like a schoolboy when she discovered that I was staring at her instead of at the hymnbook, looked at me reprovingly, pointed at the right verse and herself sang a little louder than before.

When the congregation left the church and scattered, I stood a long time under the tall firs and watched her and her mother as they went down to a small boat drawn up on the shore. Soon their oar strokes sounded over the stream, but their mood of devotion followed them, they exchanged scarcely a word. I have seen none of their faces since, but this morning as I stood on the hills and looked over the town lying in the morning mist, their figures appeared again, filling my soul with the same devotion as that Sunday in Dalecarlia. I imagine that I sighed. — Why did I take the steamer to Rätvig the next day? And why is there no romance any more?

It is cold at seven in the morning now, and you freeze if you stand still lost in thought over an old memory. One must move on and get warm again. At that it isn't difficult when you are footing it through autumn-laden earth; and the change from cold to warm is what gives us our autumn colds. I have not had one yet — I knock on my stick in lieu of a table as I say this. But old Niels was in bed with one yesterday and he looked a little under the weather when he appeared this morning.

I asked him how he felt, and he answered happily that he was over it but that yesterday " it was pretty chemical." The expression is not in the dictionary but I had no doubt as to his meaning. As little as the time when he said of some lodgers that they had " decomposed " his house.

He is digging in the garden at present, and now when the leaves are beginning to fall we discover things which the thick leafage of summer has hidden. A big wasp's nest, for instance, in a little apple tree; and my little — but soon to be big — girl studied it at as close a range as was justified considering the ways of its inhospitable inhabitants. The cat followed her and played among the perennials. Well, the garden's season will soon be over.

And then it will become the stables' season, the living room's season and the season for good books.

SUPERSTITION

It froze in the night and this morning the pools were covered with ice. Before the children bicycled off to school they ran around trampling the ice to bits, to the discomfiture of their mother who, quite rightly, feared that they would get wet feet.

It bothered me too, but not on account of the wet feet. My reason is one which it embarrasses me to confess because it will be taken as an evidence of deplorable hysteria. Hysteria, of course, is a delightful word; it covers such a multitude of different things. They have only one characteristic in common: each is some manifestation, in another person, that we do not understand.

Well, I'll run the risk and tell you why I cannot bear to tread upon the year's first ice on the pools. It is a superstition, nothing else. And when I tread

such ice and break it I have the same feeling as though I were plucking the first snowdrop or the summer's last rose. It is not because it is the first ice or snowdrop or rose. It is because it is some one rose whose place cannot be taken by any other. It is, as it were, a definite individual, and so I feel that I cannot destroy it.

Some years ago I was given a book of hunting stories and one of the tales was about wild geese. It was charming and well written and I read it with appreciation up to the point where the wild geese come sailing high in the heavens at dusk, and the hunter aims at one of them — at the leader. Now why the leader? I laid the book down and have never returned to it. Well, you may call that hysteria, but I assure you that I would have had no feeling of repugnance if it had been merely a goose in the flock that the hunter had shot. But the leader! That seemed like shooting a man, for the leader was not a mere ordinary goose.

It is certainly the same feeling — call it hysteria or what you will — that causes me the discomfort I have described over breaking the first ice, or picking the first snowdrop or the last rose. Superstition doubtless plays a part, but I don't deny that I am superstitious and what's more I am glad of it. I think life becomes richer if we populate the heavens, the earth and the air with invisible beings.

I noticed recently that a kingfisher was busily after my trout fry. The depredations of his kind have been checked up and it is computed that one kingfisher can kill as much as two dollars' worth of fish in a single day. I thought it was worth while to try and stop such a nuisance. So one morning recently I took my rifle out to the pond to end the robbery.

And there he was: on one of the runways sat the rascal and kept his eye on the small fish. If one of them dared to come to the surface the bird was on him. He shot down like an arrow after the fish and then flew back to eat him and watchfully wait for the next.

I was only ten yards away and I took lots of time to aim. I fired — the bird did turn his head and look at me, but he showed no signs of intending either to die or to give up his seat. So I gave him the other barrel. The splinters of the board he was sitting on flew around his head. He shook himself slightly; but he kept his seat and stared at me. The effect on me was quite unsettling, and I had to pull myself together with an effort before I could reload and aim at him once more.

But the next two shots were no more successful than the first and by then I was reduced to standing there and pinching my arm. Was I dreaming? Or was it the devil himself who sat on those boards and

laughed at me? At all events I was not going to waste any more cartridges, but I did summon up courage to go a little nearer. But at that the bird flew off, whistling with just that mockery that only a kingfisher can express.

Now, what have you to say? Do you really believe that at ten yards it is possible to miss a kingfisher four times running? Even if it were number three shot, can there be, at that distance, so much space between the pellets that a bird that size can sit there unscathed after four blasts?

Oh, you want to know what I believe? Well, I don't believe a thing, but if I am superstitious I have no apologies to offer. And I have given up shooting kingfishers; in fact I am leasing the pond, so after this someone else can waste his powder on the brightly colored little devil.

You think possibly that life becomes more difficult if one is superstitious? No, sir! But it gives many small matters a new importance — as if they were details in a picture. One can go on looking and looking and always find something new. And there is also this to ponder: When one reaches our age, one has been obliged to meet, under many differing circumstances, that tiresome personage called Chance. It was he who flunked us in the physics examination; it was he who gave our competitor a fair wind and becalmed us. It was he who brought

the boss to the office early on the one day, without exception, that we had to come late. . . . In a word, he has followed us all our lives and we have learned to fear him.

But let us summon up just the least little bit of superstition — and he flies like the hoarfrost and fog which disappear before the sun when, big and round and red, it rises slowly behind the woods in the east.

THE SHETLAND PONY

I had once a little girl — well, to be sure I have her still, but Kirsten is now a tall girl entering her teens — and as long as I can remember she has always loved horses. She has watched them, drawn them, cut them out of paper and collected pictures of them; everything concerning them has interested her.

She did not inherit the passion from me, a farmer who has always regarded horses as a necessary evil. They eat, of course, half our crops — well, that is putting it a little too strongly — and they are always needing new harness and shoes, which in these days does not increase their popularity. It is a temptation indeed to follow the example of the man who never fed his horses but sold them when they became hungry and bought others which had

just been fed. If Kirsten heard me say this she would come back with, "Daddy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to say such things — it's wicked."

In her my horses have always found a keen champion. She was scarcely three, I think, when I saw her, out in the yard, pitch into a man who seemed to be too severe in his treatment of a horse; since then no abuse of one has ever escaped her censure. Naturally she has always been wildly enthusiastic over circus ponies and for years she plagued me to buy her a colt. But colts have the unfortunate habit of failing to stay young — they grow up into horses that are not suitable playthings for children.

However, when she attained her eighth year I did buy her a pony.

It came late one evening when she was already in bed, but I could not deny myself the pleasure of taking it to her. I can still hear the sound of its tiny hoofs on the floor as I led it through the rooms — it was an adorable thing only three feet high. The pony and I reached Kirsten's bed and I spoke to her. She opened her eyes, closed them, rubbed them with the back of her hand, opened them again. Only then did she see the pony. She sat up in bed, blinked, and gazed at the animal as if she were seeing a vision. Then in a flash she was wide awake,

out of bed, and both arms were round the pony's neck. She was speechless with rapture. She stroked now its head, now its tiny legs, its tail, its mane and its curved back. When she heard that it was hers, her brown eyes shone as never before.

It was too bad that a little colt could not, however, spend the night on the rug beside a little girl's bed.

Heavens, how that animal was coddled! Kirsten could hardly bear to go to school the first few days, but the pony's manger was so filled with rye bread that at least during school hours she did not have to worry about its being starved. But it began to grow up, to become a small horse, and then I had to take charge of its education. Children have many innate good qualities, but they are not disciplinarians — particularly with horses.

Before the pony was a year old it was hitched to a sleigh, and since then it has been harnessed in turn to the strangest assortment of homemade vehicles imaginable — all of them constructed by the children from broken down odds and ends. The first cart was an orange crate mounted on a pair of bicycle wheels. As this collapsed very soon, a discarded harrow was robbed of its wheels and something quite new in vehicles saw the light of day.

Probably it would have been cheaper in the long run to have ordered a proper cart, but when I think

of the entranced hours the children spent in building these contraptions, and their pride when each made its first appearance, I am persuaded that letting them struggle with these problems of construction was the wiser course.

Naturally the Shetland has a name; but I am not going to reveal it to you because it is too ridiculous. You would have to live on our farm for six months at least before you could learn to approve of it. And need I add that it was not I who thought of it?

As a saddle horse the pony enjoys the distinguished qualification of being a pacer. I feel sure that is why the children's playmates who come here to ride him never fall off. The old bishops used to prefer pacers and I can easily understand why. Next to walking on your own legs riding a pacer is the most comfortable mode of locomotion.

When I crossed the yard today the Shetland was standing with his head out through the door of his stall. He is undoubtedly lonely, for the children have been skating the last few days and no one has taken him for a brisk gallop. He seems quite pathetic as he stands there looking for a little attention. The upper half-door of his stable he himself can open — and that is enough.

I'll let him out now, and I know the first thing he will do: he'll look outside the kitchen door for potato parings, and if there aren't any he'll gallop

round the yard to the barn where they are threshing. He'll be in good company, too, for both Strit and the black cat are there mousing.

Come to think of it, perhaps I ought to be there myself. . . .

GOLDEN APPLES

Every farm in the land has its destiny, a destiny, good or bad, which seems to follow it through the centuries. One is buffeted about from hand to hand, is coddled or abused as is a woman by a capricious lover. Another passes calmly from generation to generation, from father to son, and peace places its impress upon the stability of the buildings, affected only by changing tastes. But always the new owners dig themselves in as if they were to remain forever, though everything about them cries reminders of mortality.

We build up our castles to safeguard our home,
But knowing full well that as guest we have come —

is the inscription over the gate of the old manor house of Tjele and upon a stone at Ronnebekholm,

but few seem to consider themselves guests when the title to a farm is in their hands. One might have understood this in the old days when a property was much more likely to remain in one family than it is now. But he who has not tried it can hardly imagine the satisfaction there is in knowing how a farm can be bent to one's will: in appearance, in production, and in the whole atmosphere that envelops it. Just as a business may be stamped with the spirit of its leader, so on a farm every house, every tree, every field may be made to reveal its owner's name.

Yet a farm is not faithful. No sooner has the owner closed his eyes, or conveyed it to another, than a new spirit moves in through doors and crannies and spreads itself over each field, completely changing its expression and appearance.

So in the history of all old farms there is constant change — less perhaps in those passing from father to son by inheritance, though here too change of ownership may signify a new spirit. But the sanctity of a farm as a rule assures a continuous development, making no inroads on its life.

I have the right to speak of these things, for probably few farms have changed faces as has mine, and not many bear the stamp of the owner's spirit as does mine — for good and bad.

I smile now when I think of the restless eagerness

with which I attempted during the first years to blot out all traces of the deeds and spirit of former owners and to force upon my farm the new aspect I wished. I succeeded — though not entirely as I had foreseen; and when in a weak moment I feel a bit proud about something, I not only feel chagrin on other counts, but I realize how tenuous is the thread I have spun. An hour after my eyes have closed, and the rumor of it has traveled like a whisper from boundary to boundary, the thread will break and the farm will be ready to yield to new conditions, to bend under a new spirit. The patient walls will spread out their surfaces to receive color from the brush of the new owner, and the fields will chat with one another of what now awaits them — will it be tender care and watchfulness or indifference and neglect? And they will whisper a solemn vow to repay good with good and evil with evil — a vow no one may ignore with impunity.

For although the walls may be complaisant, the fields are hard and exacting in their demands. They say no man can deny to God his harvest. In ancient Rome, no doubt, they were persuaded that the goddess Ceres bestowed her gifts only upon those who brought her offerings. The form is different — the truth eternally the same.

Each farm has also its personality. One is gentle,

ugly and unsuspecting, and rewards its owner abundantly as a plain woman gives her love. Another is fascinating and alluring but barren in its beauty, like a flower without fragrance. Those who reach for anything further — and there are many who do — painfully learn one of life's lessons.

You want to ask me, I know, what my farm is like, and my answer is that, as Aphrodite gave Hippomenes three golden apples that he might throw them down during the race with Atalanta, so there are good farms to which Aphrodite has given golden apples to strew temptingly at our feet. If we stoop too often to gather them we may easily be overtaken by the fate I have mentioned. An art difficult to learn is that of collecting the golden fruit as we run. Atalanta did not know it, and so she was caught by her suitor. Many of us have discovered how we are delayed by pausing to watch a sunset or taking the longer road where the birds sing more sweetly.

On some of my fields stand trees that are in the way of the plow, throwing shadows over growing seed — they are golden apples which I ought to ignore, treading them underfoot, but I cannot, for they are like curls dancing about the face of the fields. Even if a field sulks at harvest time the farm has repaid me with its happy smile all year round.

There exists a modern pestilence called corru-

gated iron. I presume it is a necessity for prairie settlers, but on the Danish landscape it has the effect of a grimace upon a pretty face. He who has no aesthetic prejudices gladly roofs his buildings with it, but in so doing puts to flight poetry, storks and beauty. If a farm has no poetic pretensions we may use corrugated iron with a clear conscience, but if Aphrodite's golden apples lie strewn about us, have we the heart to do so?

Beauty can be fateful to a human being and so it can to a farm. Its charm makes demands which the fields may not meet, giving the owner anxious moments. Shall the trees be felled and the straw roofs give way to the inexpensive and practical corrugated iron? A farmer's life is full of such problems, and the economic crisis makes the answer more difficult for us to whom it is not alone a question of dollars and cents but also of beauty of farm and landscape.

Trees, fields and walls alike speak to those who understand their language. If they have no great experiences and glorious recollections about which to tell us — well, then we are content with little events of the day, and when the sun goes down their chatter becomes a soft singing:

Can you keep a secret, can you hear my song?
Can you keep my secret, will you keep it long?

GROWN UP

Down by the lake the dark shrubbery-lined foot-path opens into a clearing with a flower bed which the gardener calls " the three-cornered heart." He himself laid out the bed and planted it with small Chinese roses, but the tall trees all around rob the roses of both sun and air, so they do not blossom freely. Besides, in winter the water in the lake rises so high that " the three-cornered heart " swims like an island in the arm of the lake that runs into the garden. No doubt that is not good for roses.

But it is not the roses which give the place its charm. As you come down the dark path where the year's first snowdrops break through, and where later blue anemones stand in little clusters on the black soil, you see at the far end the lake framed by the trees leaning over the path, the reeds border-

ing its beach and the woods on the opposite shore. If you continue down the path you see the boat and the white bench where guests in summer sit and envy the farmer who owns all this and still goes about looking worried. How many of our guests have sat here exchanging their thoughts about the ingratitude of human beings, about the loathsome life in the city and the constant joy of the country. And young men, envying none and each with but one thought in the world — the girl by his side — they too have sat here on warm summer evenings while the fishes leaped among the rushes and the ducks quacked among the water lily leaves.

Once as a young man I discovered a lonely spot in the vicinity of Frederiksdal, a little distance from the highway, where an old boat lay among the rushes. I spent many hours there dreaming all the foolish things which young men dream, until one day I was disturbed by a girl who probably was on the same errand as myself. I became shy and embarrassed and left, although that was just the beginning of the romance! I believe we were both too bashful to take advantage of a situation as obvious as this; but should we ever meet again — she no doubt married and gray like myself — we will smile just the same at the thought of those two whom fate all too blushingly brought together.

The spot in my garden at the end of the shrub-

bery path reminds me very much of my retreat near Frederiksdal, though the dreams I dream here have little in common with those interrupted by the girl on that Sunday afternoon many years ago. I wonder what her fate has been. Maybe she has as many anxieties as I, and maybe she has no favorite Gethsemane as I have where she can go to fight her battles and make her decisions, drawing strength and encouragement from listening to the wind sighing in the reeds, the quacking of the ducks, and the blackbirds' rustling among the fallen leaves. And when all is said and done, is not this what the city folks have good reason to envy us?

When I bought this farm a wise old man told me I should have bought a better one. But I did not want one where there were no worries, but rather chose one where I would enjoy bearing them. I have had more here than I expected; but a thousand things have made them easy to bear. But those thousand things are not aware of it themselves. Arne Garborg once wrote: "Why are people so unhappy? They go about expecting happiness from others. They should make others happy; then they themselves would become happy." Maybe that is why the blackbirds hop about so gaily, why the rushes sing their jolly songs and the ducks quack contentedly along the meadow. They don't know the source of their happiness.

You remember old Scrooge in Dickens' *Christmas Carol* who becomes more and more jubilant each time he does a good deed, but even there it is an unself-conscious happiness which seems to come from within and has nothing at all to do with the turkey he had sent to Bob Cratchit's, nor the words he whispered into the ear of the old gentleman collecting for charity.

The sad thing about growing up is that we learn to know the value of our gifts. When we were young we could scatter with both hands without thought of return. We could spend our last coin for flowers for an old lady who, not knowing us, never had a chance to thank us. Our friendships were a chain of sacrifices, but the thought of reciprocity, of debit and credit, never crossed our minds. And from this very lack of egoism we won all the cheerfulness which carried us carefree through the world. But gradually as we came to know that world where one buys for a tip the bow of a fellow man and discovers that the depth of the bow is in proportion to the size of the tip, gradually, as we became involved in the struggle for existence, we too learned to measure our own bows in dollars and cents, and our actions became a series of calculated moves whose results we foresaw. I could cry with envy when I think of the seventeen year old boy who once economized for months in order to

buy a piece of Florentine mosaic for a girl who in a moment's caprice had wished for it. I envy him because he could do it without a thought of return, without hope of ever receiving even a glad and grateful smile; he did it only to make her happy for so long as a woman can be happy over a new trinket.

We can still do the same thing, but with the best of intentions we cannot hold our thoughts in check when they begin to whisper about what we may expect in return. We have lost something which will not come to us again until we are so old that we no longer desire with any hope of fulfillment.

The white bench is no longer down by the lake, but if you sit on the boat on a quiet evening it may happen that the wild ducks will come very close to you. If you stir they fly, quacking, and disappear behind the woods. They too have learned from life.

After all, it is sad to be grown up.

AFRICA CALLS

I've been in love thousands of times, but my heart never beat as it did then," wrote a young woman to me from Rhodesia. She had once been a student on my farm; then she passed an examination in agriculture at an English university and was appointed inspector on a neglected farm in Devonshire, where she lived in a dilapidated castle. Her only companions were a three-legged cat and a faithful, though ugly, cur which she had bought for three shillings from a London dog refuge, thereby saving him from death. Now she makes cheese and shoots lions on a cattle ranch in Africa.

For two nights hand-running a lion had picked one of the best bulls from a herd of nine hundred, and now in the early morning the avengers were following its tracks through the dewy grass and on

into the woods. It was in the semi-darkness under the luxuriant foliage, where they might meet the lion at any moment, that my former student's heart began to beat at the rate just indicated.

It amused me to hear this because, as far as I knew, she never had been in love. Not that that is anything you tell your instructor when you are an agricultural student. But he discovers it anyway, and, incidentally, southern women are said to have greater difficulty in hiding it than have their northern sisters.

When I had finished reading the eleven page letter I am sure there was not a member of the group around the table who was not eager to be off for South Africa immediately, even if he had to limit his equipment to a rifle and a toothbrush. I became alarmed as I looked at the adventure-hungry eyes around me. What had I done?

"There is malaria, and there are tsetse-flies down there," I interjected.

"What of that! Shucks!" they cried in chorus.

"It is a five days' journey to the nearest movie theater, and . . ."

"What difference does that make? Life down there is more exciting than any film. Won't you write and ask Molly if she can't . . ."

"No, but I will write to your parents and tell them that you are not quite sane."

"Oh, they know that already! But couldn't you work your way there as dishwasher on a ship, or as cabin maid?" asked one of the girls.

"A fine dishwasher you'd make. Such dishes — and such cabins! No, I should not have read Molly's letter to you."

How they have talked and dreamed of Africa since then! They have really had me worried. But when I look at the thing honestly I wonder if we are not tethered to life's grassplot and accept our fates with resignation, and if our knowledge of that is not why we oppose youth's demand for adventure. When the tethered cow lows because its calf has run too far away, does it express anxiety only or also just a little envy because its offspring is not tied but free to roam where it will?

I am not yet a thousand years old and so I have but little knowledge of human nature, and I am always afraid of being unjust to those on whom I exercise some influence. Suppose they are right and I am wrong! Suppose what I call solicitude is only unreasonable despotism and spiritual opposition, rooted very deeply and nourished by an instinctive envy? Suppose it were that?

Is it not the best among the young who desire adventure, and should we not rejoice in the desire? And when the youth in his twenties is equipped to follow the call, is it not wrong to hold him

back? When these young people are not properly equipped is not the fault ours for keeping them too long in perambulators and within narrow rooms? And did we do that out of consideration for them or to make things simpler for ourselves? That is not such an easy question to answer as parents believe.

My own children are not yet big enough to have put this problem up to me, and when they are I may have reached the stage where I shall prefer to see them in clerical positions with guaranteed pensions rather than out in a world where lions crouch in ambush. But until that time, every venturesome youth shall set out with my unreserved blessings. And among the group which was set dreaming about Africa by Molly's letter there is not one that I would hesitate to send out into the world with only a rifle and a toothbrush. Their parents may take that as a compliment if they will. It fills me with a little doubt if my own children have equally sensible parents.

We will see, if Molly writes again, say, in five years.

AN INVITATION

This year is the thirteenth anniversary of the first time I invited you to spend Christmas with us, and I am celebrating the occasion. I can still remember the letter I sent you, and I remember that I took pains to make my invitation as tempting as possible.

I told you about the snow that lay thick and white over the hills, where the first tracks were yet to be made. Snow which the sun caused to shine like thousands of crystals by day and which the moon colored a dim and milky blue at night. I told of the skis that stood waiting for you; of roads through the woods and fields where the snow lay thick upon the bush and twig, fields crossed here and there by the tiny footprints of hare and fox. I told you about the lake where the ice lay smooth and shining, waiting for you and your skates; and

I suggested a long tramp, with thermos bottles and lunch to be eaten in the little hunting lodge. I would provide fuel over there, and we would light a grand fire to thaw out the hut and ourselves.

But all my words were wasted. You wrote that preparations for examinations compelled you to remain in Copenhagen. And alone I had to trudge out on skis through the woods, sit alone by the log fire in the hut, and alone watch the ice flowers thaw on the windows and the water run along the sills.

The following year you had taken your degree. I wrote again. And to the others I added one other allurement — a girl, next to the most wonderful in the world, had come out here to learn housekeeping. I remember that I praised her excessively! But you went to Budapest instead and sent us a post card of that famous bridge which Baedeker informs us is twelve hundred feet long.

Another year passed and the next to the most wonderful girl in the world was married to another. But I was persistent! I wrote you about a sledge and a saddle horse and about another young girl with fiery red hair, a Southern temperament, and a burning desire to drive through the woods in a sledge on moonlit nights. You telephoned me a day or two later and asked if she really had red hair and a wish to drive in the sledge. "Yes," I said, "upon my honor." "Then I dare not come," you

replied, and the next day you wrote that you were on your way to Rome. It was there you became ill from drinking too much home-grown wine and stayed in bed eight days in your hotel room.

So I had to drive in the moonlight with the red-haired girl, and to the end of my days I shall be glad that all went well!

The following years I went on strike and my wife took charge of the Christmas invitations. She wrote for the most part of the fragrance of pine trees in the rooms and log fires in the grates — comfort within doors. And naturally of roast goose, giblet soup, broiled pigs feet with currant sauce, and all that might tempt a man entering a state of hardened bachelorhood.

You were hopeless. A somewhat excitable card told us that you had spent Christmas eve in a restaurant on Montparnasse with, to put it mildly, a rather motley crowd.

And so it went on. Not even the year I wrote that three lovely — and not red-haired — girls were to spend Christmas with us did you permit yourself to be enticed. Just a card from you: " How many did you say? Three? That's far too few! " Still that year you did come the fourth day after Christmas and stayed over the New Year.

Another year I told you that we were all alone and would enjoy a real old-fashioned cozy Christ-

mas, and, furthermore, that we had installed steam heat in the guest rooms. That was the year you went to Oslo and were married.

I then gave you up; but my wife still thinks she can get you and your Norwegian to dance around the Christmas tree with us and the children. But I must confess that I am a bit nervous about having to show your wife our ski runs. . . .

While my wife sits writing the half million little Christmas cards with which we fortify the post office balance-sheet, she has imposed upon me the task of sending you the traditional invitation. Quite apart from the fact that after so many vain attempts it is hard enough to find new words and new arguments, simply your — if I may say so — more substantial position and dawning *embonpoint* make it sorely difficult to find anything we have here which you cannot get just as well in Copenhagen.

I presume you never skate nor ski any more, and standing on a sledge with a red-haired girl on the seat no doubt has also lost its attraction for you. Far too long you have waded around in asphalt, calculations, estimates and contracts to let yourself be ravished by rushing through the woods, by the snow that sparkles blue-white in the moonlight and — by the fluttering red curls peeping out from beneath the felt cap, by the radiant young face visi-

ble above the fur coat when you lean over her shoulder to ask if she is cold.

To be sure we are growing old, but somehow I have a feeling that I am not nearly so old as you. It may be the life out here in the country, far from asphalt, cinema dramas and jazz music, that helps to keep us young.

Now here is a new lure! Don't you think you need a course in rejuvenation? Then come on Saturday and stay a week! That was number thirteen.

A BOY AND A STAR

This morning is the day before Christmas, and for the last fortnight we have been busy cutting Christmas trees in the woods. I have to harden my heart a little when I point to a tree and say, "You can take that one there. It's a good tree." At the word they go after it with their axes, and if I don't hurry and turn to look at the other trees I find it necessary to calm my feelings by telling myself that, after all, this is a beautiful fate for a fir tree. And then there sounds in my ear a sentence from a German translation of Hans Christian Andersen's story of the fir tree: "'*Freue dich deiner Jugend,' sagten die Spatzen.*" . . . "'Enjoy thy youth,' said the sparrows." Thy youth, yes; these trees are now twenty years old, and for the first ten years they just stood and fought with the heather. Only

when they got their heads well above it were they able to reach toward the sky, and now we come along and pick off the most beautiful.

But at any rate, they will have candles on their branches and a star on top, and around them children's eyes gleaming with happiness. . . . After all, doesn't that justify its life for the fir tree?

Still, I always ask dealers not to buy more than they are sure they can sell. Once we were obliged to take back a load of Christmas trees which could not be sold in the town. It cut me to the heart to think that these trees which had given up their lives to spend Christmas in a warm room should have to spend it on a wagon in the barn.

Well, here it is Christmas once more, and were I an author I should probably write a Christmas story. But I shall have to content myself by telling about an experience of my childhood which doesn't really have anything to do with Christmas but which happened on a Christmas eve over thirty years ago.

The older generation will back me up when I say that the winters were more severe then than they are now. The Limfjord, for example, was usually frozen over, and to drive across the ice with a horse and wagon was just as common then as it is uncommon now. In fact I remember plainly the ice-covered fjord sprinkled with small black dots as far

as Thy and Mors and Sallingsund. And these dots as they came nearer grew into sleighs, or horses and wagons with heavy loads, or a very big dot would grow into a flock of sheep which had traveled over twelve miles on the ice. And didn't the ice remain for months with only one little area of open water to be seen? It is this open water I am going to tell you about.

My father's farm lay opposite an island separated from the mainland by a small sound. The current running through it was so strong that ice never got a chance to form. At least I have never known the sound to be frozen over. On the island lived an old man who was sick in bed. We drove over to visit him; for when Christmas approaches, and each of us expects so much from others, we always feel the need to reciprocate, to bring gladness to those who are in trouble and who at other seasons are not given a place in our daily thoughts.

It was a sunny afternoon when we drove over, and even if salt water ice has a curiously dull aspect, nevertheless when it caught the sun's rays it gleamed as if it were made of thousands of crystals. And the sharp frost nails in the horse's shoes pierced it and threw small particles around us as the horse galloped over it.

The old man was sitting up in bed eating beef stew from a little bowl when we arrived, and he was

evidently glad to see us. Of course we must stay and have coffee! It is surprising what an unconscionably long time the service of coffee can take in the country. First, the table setting: the sugar bowl is brought and of course there is a pause for chatting. Then the cream pitcher is carried in and there is another installment of the chatting. And so it goes, with everything brought in piece by piece that might just as well have been placed on one tray to begin with.

So it is not surprising that we did not get away from the place until half past five — and on Christmas eve that means darkness. There was no moon and only one star. I discovered it because I had nothing else to do. I was wrapped in one of my mother's fur coats with the collar turned so high over my ears that my gaze was confined to a little spot in the heavens. "Can you find the way?" asked our hosts. "Yes," answered father, "if we just drive straight out from the shore here we'll be home in twenty minutes." And with that we started.

It is delightful for a small boy to sit on a footmuff, in a thick fur coat, nestled so closely beside his father that he cannot see the horse but only a little triangular piece of sky; and to know that his father is doing the driving, that the ice will bear,

and that he is on his way home to the Christmas tree, the gifts and the warm rooms. Carefree, with no responsibility, you sit there and gaze at your little bit of sky between the high collars. And when your eye lights on the single little star up there you keep looking at it and wondering why it is there when none of its companions are burning. And when it appears to be moving your eye keeps track of it.

"Father, do the stars move around?"

"Yes, some of them do; but what makes you ask?"

"Well, I can see a star and it is moving. When we started it stood over on my side and now it has gone right over to yours."

Father stopped the horse and asked: "Are you sure? If it has, we must have driven the wrong way."

"Yes, it has, for I have been watching it the whole time."

So we made a half turn, and in a few minutes we reached the other side; and mother, quite upset, was awaiting us, ready to serve dinner and light the Christmas tree.

On Christmas morning we took a walk with father and retraced our sleigh tracks of the evening before. They went out to the sound with

its open water! We had driven straight toward it and had stopped and turned our sleigh within ten yards of it.

I remember how father picked me up and kissed me. Of course I did not know why. But I can just recall getting my face wet because father's beard was full of ice.

When you are a farmer and often scold yourself because you are too much given to looking at the stars, it is a good thing to know that in any event the habit proved useful on one occasion — even if it was long, long ago.

THAT'S NO STORY!

Father, tell us a story, please! "

We were sitting in the living room by the round mahogany table on which there was a flat dish of yellow apples, and around it smaller dishes containing nuts, figs and dates. In the corner between the two doors leading to the garden was the Christmas tree, already showing the hand of the marauder, especially on the branches within the children's reach. The dogs lay in front of the hearth flattened out until they looked almost like empty skins, and with their noses practically in the fire.

Outside it was blowing up cold and between the blasts you could hear the rushing water in the mill-race. We turned off the electric light in the ceiling and bathed in the softer glow of the old-fashioned oil lamp. Kispus, who had been drowsing on the sofa, got up and ensconced himself on my lap.

"Well," I answered, "if you will stop cracking nuts for a minute, here goes.

"In 1909 there was a country fair in Aarhus. The locality in which it was pitched hasn't altered any to speak of and is still not built up, but in those days, behind a little park named Skansen, there was still an old house in a big garden. Now they have disappeared and the site is covered by a five-story building. This house was occupied by an old, lovable couple and a little boy who stayed with them while he attended grammar school.

"This boy came home one afternoon with an assignment for the next day. He had to write an essay on Caesar's remark, 'I came, I saw, I conquered.' It was the original Caesar and his Gallic war that the lad was supposed to write about. But how can anyone be expected to write on such a subject on a warm August afternoon? In fact, by evening he had done just six words: the title. And after all, when a boy is fourteen and has in his pocket an admission ticket to such an adventure land as a country fair, it is hardly reasonable to demand of him that he spend a whole evening looking for inspiration into the blank page of an exercise book. At any rate he didn't do it — but sneaked quietly through the garden and in no time was a part of the crowd in the park.

"And what should he see but Professor Labri on

a platform outside a tent — yes, he remembered him from a year or so back. This time the professor was running something which he called 'The House of Mystery,' and a mystery it was. All the boy could make out was that the people who came out of it seemed to be almost convulsed with laughter.

"On the edge of the platform the professor had a lucky wheel and it only cost a nickel to spin it; and if you won — which happened very seldom — you got a free admission to the house of mystery, for yourself and a lady. Which, of course, explains why you won so seldom. And that too may explain why the lad was using the worst possible judgment when he risked a nickel on the wheel out of a total available capital of twenty cents and an income of fifty cents a month pocket money. But risk it he did, gave the wheel a powerful swing — and won!

"The professor smartly clicked his heels, raised his top hat — which even in those days had turned green — and said: 'My dear young gentleman! The lady of your devotion must accompany you. The terrors of the house of mystery are simply not bearable by one who goes alone.'

"The boy was alone — so he stared out into the crowd. And there, among the spectators of his lucky throw, he distinguished two dark, imploring

eyes. They were those of a girl in the class below his in grammar school. The evening before, during his French preparation, he had been making a list of the prettiest girls in the school. Then the girl with the dark eyes had ranked fifth. Now he saw his mistake and in a twinkling she became number one. Another moment, and he had asked her to accompany him — and she had accepted. She reached him as quick as a flash and they pushed together through the crowd and behind the curtain from which waves of laughter came to meet them.

" They stayed together the rest of the evening and saw all that his capital permitted. But it was not so little at that, and then they went back to the house, sat on the sloping ground, ate sour apples, and looked over the sweep of the brightly lighted fair grounds. Then he saw her home — where she undoubtedly came in for a scolding from her mother for being so late. For she was only a thirteen year old.

" Then he came home, crept in through the cellar window, sneaked up to his room and lit the lamp. And there lay his open exercise book! ' I came, I saw, I conquered.' But this time he sat down and wrote his essay.

" But it wasn't about *that* Caesar. Oh, no, there was only one hero in this story and one heroine. And then the next day the teacher was mean

enough to read it aloud to the lower class. And the little dark-eyed girl was so embarrassed that she wanted to creep under the desk.

"Well, suppose now you crack some nuts for your father."

"Now, father, that's no story," said my critical fourteen year old son. "There's a lot more you must tell us. Whether they married each other, and that sort of thing, you know."

Kispus raised himself, arched his back and stretched. Then he jumped up on my shoulder and rubbed his ears against my cheek. — No, Kispus, they didn't marry each other. She is now married to a lawyer in Odense. And he — well, he sits and tells stories to his children.

CHRISTMAS

Every year when Christmas draws nigh, when the cold wind from the lake howls round the gables, I remember the biting winds which at Christmastide swept over my childhood home on the Limfjord. And I remember the water which I knew and loved at all seasons — most of all in summer when it bore my boat and cast its foam over my bow. But I loved it too on those dark winter nights when it roared against the white sandy beach and seemed to send its icy currents over the land itself. Then it was doubly cozy indoors, and peculiarly enough one was possessed of a special sympathy for those at sea. Sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace while father in his big chair told stories of wintry, icy adventure, we really learned to appreciate our home.

It was on such a night that I heard the following story; and if I tell it with all the art I have, I feel no twinges of conscience, for whatever I do the story can never make the impression on the reader that it made on the little boy who sat with wide open eyes by the fire, facing his father's armchair. In case you wonder, I assure you that this story is true, and even if I tried to I could not find words that would paint the deed in brighter colors than it deserves.

My father's farm had been occupied a generation or so before by a tough old fellow whose temper was feared by everyone on the place, and whose wife, even, preferred to avoid him when he was angry. She made herself as inconspicuous as possible, so that for long stretches he would not even see her, and as Christmas approached she avoided his presence more than ever, for then he always began to rave about "all this woman's nonsense that nearly sets the farm on end."

But the day before Christmas a blessed peace always came over the household, for it was the old chap's invariable custom to drive into town in his sleigh, do his final Christmas shopping, and foregather with his friends in the hotel. So he did on this occasion when an icy wind was sweeping through the streets of the little town on the shore of the fjord. From the warm taproom of the hotel

you could look out over the harbor and the bay beyond, where the thick, broken-up gray ice extended for miles, whipped together in masses by the sharp east wind. As you looked further you could still see it in heaps riding on what seemed smaller waves until, as your gaze approached the horizon, it became invisible.

Most of the town merchants and some of the more prominent neighborhood farmers were gathered in the taproom that afternoon, warming themselves with tea-punch and toddies. The chilly old landowner joined them, and they lost no time in telling him about the fishing boat with three men on board which lay wedged in the ice about two thousand yards from shore. There was no hope of rescuing them and it was impossible that they should survive Christmas night.

The blood mounted to the old fellow's temples: " And you sit here and talk about it? You are going to let them freeze to death there on Christmas night? "

And turning to one of the dealers, he asked him: " Why don't you throw your damned timber out there and make a bridge to them? "

" Can't be done — you'd only ruin your timber even if it didn't all drift away."

" Will you deliver it at my expense? " asked the

old fellow as he got up from his chair, shaking with anger.

Before long a whole army was busy carrying timber of all sizes to the harbor, and on the outermost pier stood the old man giving orders. Plank after plank, board after board, was shoved out on the ice and gradually the bridge stretched out toward the boat. They were half way there when the dealer's stock gave out. But there was another lumber dealer in town and his stock was requisitioned. When that was exhausted they still had a hundred yards to go — and it was growing dark.

Then the old fellow bought a shack which stood by the harbor, had it knocked down, carried out piece by piece — and at last the boat was reached. It was quite dark by then, and half the town stood on the pier excitedly waiting for the sound of heavy steps as the exhausted men were carried to shore.

" Are they alive? " cried the old man as the steps approached. " Yes," came back through the darkness, and soon the rescuers stood on the pier with the three exhausted fishermen. They were carried to the hotel where warm beds awaited them. The crowd followed, and suddenly someone shouted a " long life " for the old man and half the town cheered him. He acknowledged the ovation with a growling dismissal.

The next moment he was hitching up to leave. A man approached him: "Just a minute. I only want to thank you for using my timber for that job. Naturally I don't expect any pay for it, and I'll take care of retrieving it."

As he got into the sleigh someone else came up: "Say, will you let me buy that timber back? I'll give you the same price you gave me, and thank you besides for letting me help."

He started home while groups in the streets were still discussing the day's exploit. He stopped at a shop and was overtaken by a man who had run after his sleigh:

"I hope you understand that I wanted no pay for that shack. I can use the boards again when they drift ashore. I am glad you wanted to use it. And I want to thank you. Good night and a merry Christmas."

When he reached home his wife was very disappointed to discover that he had forgotten the flag which was to have decorated the roast goose, and the pink tissue for its cuffs. But she quickly forgot her disappointment, for she had never before seen her husband so happy on Christmas.

Not until the next day did she learn what had happened.

THE LAST CANDLE

Once more the Christmas tree was lighted on New Year's eve. Each child took a burning candle and circled the tree, lighting its candles as he went. They were competing to see who should light the most.

At last all but one were kindled and two children reached it at the same moment from opposite sides. Had this been summer or any season other than Christmas, there would have been a contest. But now they stopped, each with outstretched hand holding its lighted candle a few inches from the unlighted one on the tree. The boy withheld his hand because he thought, "Let her have the chance to light it, or she may feel hurt." And the girl withheld hers, saying to herself, "It isn't fair not to let him light it. It is the last one, and I have lighted so many."

They stood looking at each other and at the unlit candle — possibly a few seconds — but that was long enough for me who watched them from the big chair by the window to read the thoughts that went through their minds — and their hearts, too, if thoughts go that way. As the boy, the smaller and therefore the more easily tempted, finally raised his candle and kindled that on the tree, I saw that the satisfaction over the outcome was shared equally by the two children. And I was reminded of a scene in a story by an English author.

It was the evening before St. Joseph's day in a little chapel in London, and two young people had come in at the same time to light a candle at his altar. St. Joseph is the poor people's saint, and each of them had something to ask him. A candle cost a penny, and the young man, who had entered first, dropped his penny into the box before he noticed that there was only one left. That candle became his fate and hers, for he stepped aside and let her take it. And when, in a whisper, she asked him why, he answered that probably she would have been more disappointed than he was if she had not been able to light a candle for St. Joseph.

It was bravely said, for the penny he had dropped in the box was his last; his clothes were faded and threadbare; while the girl standing beside him wore expensive furs and had small and white hands.

What could she want to ask of St. Joseph? That, of course, he could not know; but really she had more to pray for than he had.

And St. Joseph, who had brought them together, gave them his blessing — in a manner which is duly recorded in the book.

If, now, this young man had been the sort who knows his rights and is determined to get them, he would have said to himself: "Why in the world shouldn't I take this candle? I paid for it. If she had got here first, she'd have taken it. Naturally, I'll do the same — isn't that obvious?" He would have taken it, lit it and gone on his way. And if he had thought about it again as he went out he would have ended by saying, "Oh, well, it couldn't be helped." And then he would have tried to feel happy at getting there first.

And St. Joseph? Would it not be all the same to him, as long as the candle was lit? Well, if I were he, no doubt I would prefer it the other way. But that is perhaps because I am not so strict in business matters. And to buy a candle for St. Joseph and pay for it with a penny is pure business: cash payment and immediate delivery. What has that to do with soft-boiled sentimentality?

Yes, yes, but I cannot help thinking of the two children beside the Christmas tree on New Year's eve — and then of the fact that the two who met at

the altar of St. Joseph would not later have had that beautiful adventure in the enchanted town by the Adriatic sea if he had taken the last candle, leaving none for her. And I cannot help thinking how poor our lives would be in adventure if we always hastened to snatch the candles for which we have paid, not thinking of the person behind us — who may possibly be better clad than we, whose hands may be whiter than ours, who perhaps may be more disappointed than we at not being able to light a candle for St. Joseph.

We may not be Catholics and may not light candles at the altars of our saints, and yet, like the children that night by the Christmas tree, we often face the choice between satisfaction at "getting there first" and the joy of seeing other people's hopes fulfilled. For many of us it is not a choice. Either we are born with the lesson already implanted, or life and the struggle for bread rub it in, that he who comes last finds the box of candles empty.

And when, on that New Year's eve, the few moments beside the Christmas tree were ended, I sat in the big chair and wished ever so earnestly that the two children might never learn that lesson — even if all their lives they must ask boons of St. Joseph.

NEW YEAR

It is the last day of the old year and already you can hear the boys in the town shooting in the new year. My own boys have also planned the noises they intend to make. It is a queer thing how noise of every kind is inseparably linked with human proceedings, while we never celebrate any occasion with stillness or silence. The more festive we are the more noise we make.

Some years ago I stood, one still late summer evening, looking out over the sea from a pier in Farum. The moon was low and cast long shadows from the little island toward the shore. On the bridge behind me a train with lighted coaches rushed by, leaving the night more silent than ever. I was just thinking that few people have easier access to quiet woods and lakes than those who

dwell in Copenhagen when from a nearby pathway I heard a voice: "It doesn't matter; just any one of them." And then a phonograph began to play.

"Just any one of them." Anything except quietness. What makes people so deathly afraid to be lost in silence? Is it some inferiority complex which urges the lord of creation to assert himself when nature is about to overwhelm him and make him but a small detail in a large picture, so that he must set himself up against nature and her silence by making a noise of some kind? We assert our superiority and feel ourselves less small. Youth seems to find it so confoundedly necessary to do that nowadays.

In one of our guest rooms hangs an old picture of an undergraduate and a young girl in a rowboat. He has on his college cap and she a large hat with ribbons. As she leans over to pick water lilies he rests on his oars and looks impassioned. I do not insist that such a scene would be inconceivable to-day, but our picture of it would certainly need a few corrections. Of course both parties would be wearing quite different headgear. Present-day young men are much too blasé to wear college caps beyond the first month, and no young girl in her right mind would go to meet anyone in a hat like that. Then in all probability both would be smoking cigarettes. Certainly on the thwart between

them would be a portable phonograph, and the young girl would be winding it — and not picking water lilies. Yes, and naturally the young man's expression would not be impassioned — he would be content to stare like an imbecile at the phonograph while it provided the entertainment.

My little girl grieved her father by wishing for a portable phonograph as a Christmas present, and he grieved her by not giving it to her and in the bargain forbidding her to have one. We have a piano on which she may play as much as she likes, and should she wish to try any other instrument I have no objection. But the point is that she must herself do something and not passively allow herself to be entertained — largely to avoid quietness.

For, just as I wish to teach my children not to be afraid of darkness, I want to teach them not to fear quietness, not to fear being alone with themselves and their thoughts. Should my little girl want to hear music, she must hasten to learn to play and, until then, be content with her mother's playing or her old father's strumming.

I wonder if all taste for independent music will die out in the course of another generation or two. Are there any young people left who like to play? Are not ninety per cent of them satisfied with turning on the radio switch or winding up the phonograph? In bygone days on a still evening we often

heard the tones of a harmonica from a rowboat on the lake. Now, motorboats, noisy and smelly, race up and down, and there is always a phonograph going on the foredeck.

The road between Aarhus and Odder crosses a wooded hollow with a little creek at the bottom. It is a delightful spot in summer, and as I passed it once last year I stopped the car and sat still and enjoyed it. Two cyclists came toward me who also appeared to think it a lovely spot, for they dismounted and laid their cycles in the ditch. While one of them unpacked lunch the other placed a portable phonograph on the roadside and put on a record, and both listened to the latest tunes while they ate their lunch. *Horror vacui?*

Now it is New Year's eve, and I sit here out on my farm, sour and envying those who go forth to greet the new year with tremendous noise and without a serious thought. In a way I really do envy them, for there is surely no doubt that those are the happiest who think the least. On the other hand I cannot help remembering I. P. Jacobsen's description of the plague in Bergamo. Gradually, as the plague spread, people became serious, took refuge in the churches and drew together in prayer. But little by little they were seized with "gallows-mirth" and flung themselves into the wildest revelries, that they might forget death and the horrors

surrounding them, until at length the town presented a single picture of the most blasphemous gaiety.

I wonder what the coming year will bring. To many of us the tone of our New Year's celebrations is not far removed from a sort of gallows-mirth. I wonder if, when all is said and done, it is not better to spend this season in somewhat the same manner as we can live the coming year in. It would be sad if we had to pay for this season's festivities with bitterness when the next New Year's bells ring out. We do not even know if we will be able to hold festival next year, but we can have quietness if only we will.

AFTER CANDLEMAS

The lark is said to have appeared in central Jutland. When I heard that I thought at first that it was probably a fib, but then I remembered the old proverb which says that the lark will be silent as many weeks after Candlemas as the days between its first appearance and that feast.

Now Candlemas is the second of February, and if the lark does not come before then the proverb cannot be applied. As it has not appeared this year until the middle of February we cannot, on the lark's testimony, look forward to a late spring.

However, we should not turn up our noses at proverbs. In the old days it may have been easier than it is now to talk nonsense without having a pack of baying critics at one's heels. But even if the grounds for many of the old theories were

wrong, bringing them therefore into contempt with the present highly sophisticated generation, it doesn't follow that the ideas themselves were wrong. They were often founded on the experience of centuries, inherited from generation to generation, fastened in the folk mind through constant affirmation. Present-day skeptics should not imagine that their forefathers were shallow enough to hand down to their children sayings which had proved in their own experience to be misleading. In those times long before the barometer and the radio forecasts, the lore of wind and weather was naturally the chief subject matter of these proverbs.

And many of them are more worthy of belief than you might think.

I stood one day last summer by a stable door talking with an old neighbor. It began to rain and I remarked that we were in for quite a shower.

"No," he replied, "it will be a steady rain."

I asked him how he knew.

"Because the chickens are not seeking shelter. If it were only a shower they would get under cover to keep from getting wet. But when it's going to rain all day that wouldn't do them any good and so they don't bother."

Of course it did rain all day, though apart from that I have no evidence to prove the theory. Is it possible that chickens, who are not very lavishly

equipped by nature, can teach us things about the weather? If it is, we are challenged to use our eyes and find out what other, cleverer animals may have to teach us.

I don't know how wise the lark is. When, in times like these, it can work up an interest in Danish agriculture and rehearse for its singing season in the middle of February, it does not, to human eyes at least, look very intelligent. On the other hand, the lark probably doesn't know that we have a meteorological institute which can tell to a single raindrop what the weather will be a month from now, and so he thinks it incumbent on him to give us his discreet hints by appearing in Jutland either before or after Candlemas.

Larks, moonlight and homely young girls were the three things which above all else could awaken my muse when I was seventeen. The larks, I think, because they seemed to stand still high in the air and sing while I lay on the ground looking up into the blue. And for the world-weariness of a seventeen year old boy there is nothing so solacing as the song of the lark and the fragrance of green grass.

And moonlight always recalls a row on the Limfjord one harvest night, phosphorescence shining in the wake of the oars as they were pulled through the water. Myself, long-haired and

fifteen, in the bow, two unimportant people at the oars, and at the stern, rudder in hand, a young girl who sang "Moonlight on the Water."

They say it is delightful to glide in a gondola along the moonlit canals of Venice, but I wonder if even there a lover's heart could tremble more than did mine that September night on the Limfjord. Were not her eyes dark brown under long black lashes and didn't they have that dreamy but wise look that causes a fifteen year old boy to lose his head? "Come, Bellina, no one sees us."

She was married six months later; and her husband wrote me lately, "We have ten children." Oh, youth!

Homely young girls — yes, it is true I have a weakness for them. It was, I think, Rousseau who once wrote a beautiful passage about an ugly woman's love, but it was not from him I learned, and when at school hops I danced by preference with the homeliest, there may have been from the first a natural explanation: that the handsome girls did not care to have me tread on their toes. What I learned about young girls came therefore from those nobody else cared to dance with. And when the observer is not distracted by visible traits, he is able to get a better view of those of the soul.

Does that sound ungallant toward the girls in whom from time to time I have been interested?

If so it is because the most of them, like Anitra in *Peer Gynt*, don't give a hang for a soul and prefer a golden ring. But speaking of girls — some twenty years ago Georg Brandes, in a talk before a students' union, gave a special piece of advice to the young Russians: "Remember one thing, avoid eating onions or the young women will not kiss you." After which Professor Birck arose and remarked that, if Brandes was right in his major premise, he would say: "Eat onions, eat onions."

Now both our counselors are dead, and we who did not eat onions are tethered to life's grazing field, middle-aged and staid. But when the lark sings and the moon shines over the lake, how easily we forget all the vexations of daily life. *Wir haben weit bess'res Verlangen* — "Our longing is toward far better things."

KNOCKINGS

There is a knocking going on in the house. For the most part it is up in the storerooms in the attic, but when I go up there is nothing to see or hear. Yesterday as I was coming down the path with a guest we both heard a hammering on the attic floor —but no one was there. When I questioned the maids they said they had seen no one, and while I was talking with them it came again, a knocking so violent that we heard the bottles rattle in a basket on the attic floor.

"'Sick' Faustus on to it," said the guest. "There must be a natural explanation for it."

"But suppose I am not interested in a natural explanation and am satisfied with the mystery? "

"You don't mean that you believe . . . ? "

Meanwhile one of my dogs had run up there and

sniffed around among the boxes, barking softly now and then. It must have been a mouse he was after.

When the guest had left and I was alone in my room, I again heard the knocking, but it may have been my imagination. Probably thoughts that knocked for admittance, and certainly they came in. For while I sat there and looked out over the grounds which the autumn winds had swept clean and dry, I was invaded by thoughts of all the people who had ever lived in this house. They came in through the cracks and keyholes and filled the room with scents and images, of lavender, of powdered wigs, of vinaigrettes, of tight corsets and warm mead.

What's left of all that now?

Lavender has always so much to tell, and now its fragrance began to whisper about the thoughts which had birth in these rooms, of the dreams which floated here; of all the fates which have left their signatures as definitely as if they had been written with diamonds on the windowpanes. Is it likely that there is not the slightest trace left by that sort of thing? Is it possible that people can live, suffer, be happy, love and hate for centuries in an old house without leaving traces of their spirits remaining in the rooms? Could all this really have

been carried off and stuffed into the coffin before the lid was closed?

In an old desk in a little room I found once a tuft of lavender and a pressed violet. They had lain there certainly more than a half century, and the violet had lost its perfume. But the lavender was still fragrant. I wonder if it is not so with the souls of men, if the soul does not live on where its bearer spent much of a long life — live on for a shorter or a longer time according to its strength; whether, whatever happens thereafter, its fragrance does not remain. It cannot be washed away, it cannot be ignored. It glides in through open doors, it comes as a faint breath, a sighing or a soft humming, when we have put out the light and lie down to sleep. Doubtless there are people who never hear the sighing, whose senses never mark the odor of lavender, and perhaps they are happier than we who live our lives under the shadow of the past, fearful that we may break its harmonious unfolding.

I have often wondered, as I stood by the window and looked out over the lake, about those who stood here before me and of what they thought and felt. Have their eyes gazed at a boat fighting its way from the further shore? Was it sadness or wrath that followed its course over from the woods?

Did the hearts of those on the hither side beat in expectation, in fear or in anger? Or was it only in quiet melancholy that those eyes roved over the water while sorrow filled the room behind them and made it seem small as a prison cell?

And how fares the spirit of the past in this house today? One often talks of a good or evil spirit ruling a home. If that means anything, and I think it does, I wonder if it doesn't often happen that that spirit may fight against the others that ruled formerly in the same rooms, and, like the lavender, wish ever to dominate the room's atmosphere? And we ourselves are in the fight on the one side or the other; the house is in it, and the old trees stretch out their branches toward the small panes to join in. But I don't really believe that the trees will side with the old spirit. The trees have always been outside observers and have therefore looked more critically on what went on behind the windows. And I do not think that all which went on here was worth following.

Certainly many tears have been shed here, and many days, weeks and months have dragged along in despair, in longing and in hopeless anger. Harsh words have sounded in these rooms; but in equal measure have the walls heard tender words whispered, and promises given, so that there is hardly a wall that does not yet echo curses, nor a door

that closes without echoing a memory. Is it then so remarkable that the house is full of noises?

I believe that if a man's spirit has completely entered into a house, so that the two have become one, that spirit will live on between those walls for generations. And not only does a house become richer by being populated in this way, but we ourselves are given a responsibility which we otherwise would not feel.

What will the spirit be like which we leave behind in our rooms when we are gone? Will it be a spirit which frightens children when they cross the attic floor in the dusk, or will it hang like a soft fragrance of lavender about the child's bed when it sleeps, and over the brows of the elders when they stand at the window looking toward the sunset?

That is a responsibility laid upon us; but the reward outweighs the responsibility.

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